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School Counselor Advocacy with LGBT Students:  
A Qualitative Study of High School Counselor Experiences

A Dissertation Presented

by

MARIA E. GONZALEZ

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University  
of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 2014

College of Education



School Counselor Advocacy with LGBT Students:  
A Qualitative Study of High School Counselor Experiences

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MARIA E. GONZALEZ

Approved as to style and content by:

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Carey Dimmitt, Chair

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Ximena Zúñiga, Member

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Lee Badgett, Member

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Christine B. McCormick, Dean  
College of Education

## DEDICATION

To my parents, Carmen and Tony:

All that I am and all that I have accomplished, I owe to you

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For me, the process of dissertation writing has been akin to putting together an enormous jigsaw puzzle, one that could not have been made possible without the help of faculty members, friends and family. Every bit of feedback, every vote of confidence, and every gesture of support—no matter how big or small—played an integral role in contributing to the whole of the puzzle. Now that the mosaic is finally complete, I would like to express my gratitude to several individuals whose contributions warrant special mention.

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Few people have shown the degree of passion and commitment to the work of social justice as my committee member, Ximena Zúñiga. Indeed, she is *Mafalda* incarnate, always offering a critical perspective and pushing me to think more systemically about my research. Outside of my dissertation, I am grateful for having been afforded the opportunity to collaborate with Ximena on a variety of projects that have contributed immeasurably to my growth as a scholar and educator.

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While not a member of my dissertation committee, Pat Griffin provided invaluable counsel during the literature review and pilot study phases of my dissertation. As a pioneer in the safe schools movement, her work has served as a constant source of inspiration. I'm still not kidding when I say, "I want to be Pat Griffin when I grow up."

As the critical reader to my dissertation, Javier Campos offered valuable feedback and encouraged me to view my research through a more global lens. I thank Javier for his commitment to improving the overall quality of my dissertation.

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Above all, I thank my family – especially my parents, Carmen and Tony Gonzalez for “smoothing out the bumps” in my path and teaching me to always do the same for those who follow. I could fill up all the pages of this dissertation with expressions of gratitude and it would still not fully capture the depth of my appreciation. Indeed, my parents’ support, sacrifice, and unconditional love have made this moment possible; this doctorate is just as much theirs as it is mine.

Finally, I am tremendously indebted to Austin Laufersweiler who provided the inspiration for this dissertation topic. His story is a testament to the power of supportive faculty and safe spaces, spaces where students' enormous potential to inspire, empower and lead can be fully realized. Austin—and young people like him—are the reason I do this work.



## ABSTRACT

### SCHOOL COUNSELOR ADVOCACY WITH LGBT STUDENTS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELOR EXPERIENCES

MAY 2014

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In recent years, advocacy has become a centerpiece of the school counseling profession, (American School Counseling Association (ASCA), 2005; Field, 2004). Nevertheless, there exists a dearth of empirical research on school counselor advocacy in general and virtually none as it relates to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students specifically. To begin addressing this gap in the literature, the purpose of this qualitative dissertation study was to examine the experiences of high school counselors in the southeastern United States who have served as advocates for and with LGBT students across identity groups, with a specific focus on race and class. The overarching research questions that informed and provided structure to the qualitative process were aimed at more thoroughly understanding how school counselors define advocacy within the framework of school counseling; how school counselors advocate for and with LGBT students across identity groups; and how school counselors describe factors that facilitate and impede advocacy efforts for and with LGBT students.

In order to explore diverse participant experiences and contextual differences, this qualitative study took place at various high schools across the southeastern United States in urban, rural and suburban school settings. Twelve high school counselors were interviewed for

this study. Data were collected through twelve one-time semi-structured interviews and a document review. A dialectical approach to data analysis (Galman, 2013), informed by both inductive and deductive reasoning, shaped the coding scheme. Specifically, I relied on open coding, the research questions, the conceptual framework, constant comparative analysis (Glasser, 1965) and previous scholarship to analyze the data.

Guided by previous scholarship, a social justice education theoretical lens, the American Counseling Association (ACA) Advocacy Competencies, a pilot study and three overarching research questions, six thematic categories emerged from the data: (1) student advocacy, (2) education as advocacy, (3) systems advocacy, (4) social/political advocacy, (5) advocacy as purpose-driven, and (6) support. Themes are presented and explored as they relate to the various manifestations of school counselor advocacy and the factors that facilitate, motivate and hinder advocacy efforts. Implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research are also discussed.

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# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, more scholars (DePaul, Walsh & Dam, 2009; Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010; Whitman, Horn & Boyd, 2007) have identified the need for school counselors to advocate for and with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students. Additionally, the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) Ethical Standards (2004) and position statement (2007) on LGBT students call upon school counselors to foster an environment that provides respect and affirmation for all students regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

Despite these standards, recent scholarship has shown that LGBT students experience a more hostile school climate than their heterosexual, non-transgender counterparts (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009; Graybill, Varjas, Meyers, & Watson, 2009). In 2011, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN, 2012) conducted a study of over 8,500 LGBT high school students' perceptions of school climate. Roughly 82% of respondents reported experiencing verbal harassment at school while 71% reported hearing pejorative remarks such as "faggot" and "dyke" often or frequently. Findings also indicated that LGBT students are more likely to feel unsafe at school and often miss school as a result of safety concerns. Perhaps most significantly, this data revealed that school personnel seldom intervene when anti-LGBT bullying or harassment occurs, which further isolates LGBT students. Such results are consistent with previous research which found that higher rates of anti-LGBT bullying and harassment are partly the result of school personnel "looking the other way" when such incidences occur (Mahan, et al., 2007; Singh, Orpinas, & Horne, 2010). Conversely, the GLSEN study (2012) also found that supportive educators contribute to a more positive school climate and safer learning

environment. Such results demonstrate the need for school counselors and other educators to serve as advocates and agents for systemic change within their schools and larger communities.

With their leadership training and knowledge of diversity issues, the school counselor of the twenty-first century is uniquely positioned to serve as an advocate for and with all students (Dixon, Tucker & Clark, 2010; Ratts, DeKruyf, & Chen-Hayes, 2007). Over the past decade, the school counseling profession has embraced a more proactive, advocacy-focused approach, one that calls upon school counselors to be social justice advocates and agents for systemic change (Ratts, DeKruyf, & Chen-Hayes, 2007; Singh, Urbano, Haston, & McMahon, 2010). Multi-dimensional in scope, the modern school counseling framework merges collaboration, consultation, leadership and data collection (American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model, 2005). More specifically, school counselors are expected to motivate systemic change by using data to advocate for student success and by working alongside students, parents, community members and school personnel to lead the call for school reform (ASCA National Model, 2005).

A growing body of literature reflects these recent shifts in the profession, as more scholars are emphasizing the need for school counselor advocacy in addressing issues of social oppression in schools (DePaul, Walsh, & Dam, 2009; Dixon, et al., 2010; Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010; Whitman, Horn, & Boyd, 2007). Despite the call for school counselor advocacy, to date there is no empirical research specific to school counselor advocacy with LGBT students and a dearth of conceptual research. Within the realm of advocacy scholarship, only five studies (Field, 2004; Fitch & Mitchell, 2004; Holmberg-Abel, 2012; Shaeffer, Akos, & Barrow, 2010; Singh, Urbano, Haston, & McMahon, 2010) have explored the phenomenon of school counselor advocacy. Research on LGBT students is also limited, although this is changing as more scholars

(DePaul, et al., 2009; Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010; Goodrich & Luke, 2010; Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006) acknowledge the need for school counselor advocacy for and with LGBT students.

### **A. Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of high school counselors in the southeastern United States who have served as advocates for and with LGBT students across identity groups, with a specific focus on race and class.

### **B. Significance of Research**

Historically, empirical scholarship within school counseling has been scarce. Increasingly, scholars within the field acknowledge the urgency for school counseling practice to be more firmly rooted in research (Dimmitt, Carey, McGannon, & Henningson, 2005; House & Hayes, 2002; McGannon, Carey & Dimmitt, 2005; Whiston & Sexton, 1998) in order to identify best practices, provide accountability, substantiate the impact of school counseling programs on student success, and continue to inform professionals within the field (Dimmitt, et al. 2005; Myrick, 1984). With regard to advocacy in particular, school counseling models require school counselors to serve as advocates for and with all students, regardless of social group membership (ASCA, 2005; Education Trust, 1997; Ratts, et al., 2007). Nevertheless, the majority of research on school counselor advocacy remains largely conceptual. To date, there are only five empirical studies related to school counselor advocacy (Field, 2004; Fitch & Marshall, 2004; Holmberg-Abel, 2012; Schaeffer, Akos, & Barrow 2010; Singh, Urbano, Haston & McMahon, 2010). The paucity of empirical scholarship on advocacy has created what Trusty and Brown (2005) refer to as a “dire” need for scholarship aimed at examining school counselor advocacy in practice.

More narrowly, of the few existing studies related to school counselor advocacy, none are associated with LGBT students (DePaul, et al., 2009; Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010) despite increased calls for school counseling research with this population (DePaul, et al., 2009; Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010; Goodrich & Luke, 2010). By examining the experiences of school counselors who have served as advocates for and with LGBT students across social identity groups, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that shape effective school counselor advocacy in general and with this demographic in particular.

In addition to a lack of studies related to school counselor advocacy, there also exists a dearth of empirical research within education and school counseling addressing the diversity of LGBT students across multiple marginalized identities and the extent to which contextual factors—such as geographical location and school setting—and other social identities impact LGBT students’ negotiation of their sexual orientation and gender identity in school (Chen-Hayes, 2001; DePaul, et al., 2009; Guitierrez, 2004; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2004). The few studies that have considered the intersecting identities of LGBT students have generally been limited to race and ethnicity and, to a lesser degree, class and gender. In order to be more reflective of all students’ identities and experiences at the micro-, meso-, and macrolevels, this study used a social justice education (hereafter SJE) theoretical lens to explore the ways in which school counselor participants considered LGBT students’ other social identities in their advocacy efforts. The foundational aspects of SJE will be discussed further in the section entitled “Conceptual Framework” as well as in the literature review. While school counselor participants were encouraged to discuss their advocacy experiences with LGBT students across all social identities—including race, class, ability, religious/spiritual affiliation, and gender—particular

attention was given to race and class in order to build on previous scholarship (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009; Pascoe, 2007; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2004; Russell & Truong, 2001).

The study's potential contributions extend beyond the realm of academia. Specifically, results generated from this research can be used to inform and ultimately improve school counseling practice. Understanding the factors that facilitate advocacy in general and with LGBT students more specifically will allow for more effective advocacy instruction within school counselor graduate education and professional development programs (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Goodrich & Luke, 2010; Goodrich & Luke, 2010; Luke, Goodrich, & Scarborough, 2011). Additionally, the data from this study can be leveraged by practicing school counselors to advocate within their schools and districts for the resources necessary to effectively engage in advocacy work for and with LGBT students. Ultimately, the long-term implications of this proposed study include motivating sustainable change within the field of school counseling and ensuring that related social justice issues—such as making sure that all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender expression, have access to a quality education—take a more central role.

### **C. Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual framework is a system of theoretical perspectives, suppositions, and beliefs that scaffold empirical scholarship (Maxwell, 2005). According to Merriam (2009), a conceptual framework guides and informs all research, both quantitative and qualitative. This study used the American Counseling Association's (ACA) Advocacy Competencies (Lewis, Arnold, House & Toporek, 2002; Ratts, DeKruyf, & Chen-Hayes, 2007) through the lens of SJE as a multi-level conceptual framework for understanding social oppression and developing social justice

interventions to shape the research questions, interview protocol, and data analysis (See Appendix C) for the dissertation study.

SJE's attention to the multi-level analysis of the dynamics of privilege and oppression is balanced by attention to the opportunities for intervention and change at the micro, meso and macro level (Zúñiga, Lopez & Ford, 2014). In order to foster sustainable social and systemic transformation, social justice education has as its ongoing aim the individual and collective empowerment of all groups in society (Love, 2000). Within schools, such an approach means empowering students to understand their social identities and personal experiences within an unequal social system that grants systemic privileges or disadvantages to individuals based on social group memberships (Bell, 2007; Love, 2000).

With a similar emphasis on multi-level change and student/client empowerment, the ACA Advocacy Competencies are designed to address injustice at the individual, school/community, and public arena levels both with and on behalf of students and clients (Lewis, et al., 2002). In this sense, the ACA Advocacy Competencies, guided by a social justice theoretical orientation, can be used as a framework for better understanding how school counselors engage in advocacy for and with students across identity groups. Specifically, the ACA Advocacy Competencies provide an outline for tackling broader systemic issues—including discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity—while addressing individual concerns and encouraging self-advocacy (Crethar, 2009).

The ACA Advocacy Competencies are categorized under three levels of advocacy: client/student advocacy, school/community advocacy, and public arena level advocacy (Lewis, et al., 2002). Two domains and specific competency areas fall under each level of advocacy (See Appendix E). The domains under the level of client/student advocacy include client/student

empowerment and client/student advocacy. The school community/level of advocacy is focused on the domains of community collaboration and systems advocacy. Finally, the two domains included in the public arena level are public information and social/political advocacy. By including indirect and direct forms of action, the competencies provide a framework for social justice advocacy at the micro-, meso-, and macro-level (Ratts, et al., 2007).

#### **D. Research Questions**

Research questions inform, guide and provide structure to the process of qualitative inquiry. This study was driven by previous scholarship, the conceptual framework and the following research questions:

- a) How do school counselors define advocacy within the framework of school counseling?
- b) How do school counselors advocate for and with LGBT students across identity groups?
- c) How do school counselors describe factors that facilitate and impede advocacy for and with LGBT students?

The research questions were guided by a comprehensive literature review and the conceptual framework, the latter of which was informed by both the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Lewis, et al., 2002) and a social justice education theoretical orientation. The research questions guided the interview protocol and provided a way to structure descriptions of participants' experiences.

#### **E. Definitions of Key Terms**

To ensure clarity, operational definitions of the following terms used in this dissertation are outlined below: *advocacy*, *LGBT*, *school climate*, *social justice education*, *systemic change*, *race*, and *class*.



*Advocacy.* Advocacy is commonly described as taking action to support an issue or an individual(s) (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, 1999) by challenging the underlying circumstances at the root of the problem (Brown & Trusty, 2005; House & Hayes, 2002). Within the framework of school counseling, advocacy refers to intervening on behalf of a student or a student issue; demonstrating multicultural competence; providing resources and offering support; encouraging positive systemic change in schools; eliminating barriers to student achievement and development; guaranteeing access to a quality curriculum; and teaching self-advocacy skills (Brown & Trusty, 2005; Field, 2004). Advocacy occurs at multiple levels (Brown & Trusty, 2005; Ratts, et al., 2007) and involves collaboration, leadership and systemic change (ASCA, 2005). Within school counseling literature, "advocacy" and "social justice advocacy" are often used interchangeably. Indeed, school counselor advocacy is—by definition—rooted in social justice. School counselors have a professional (ASCA National Model, 2005) and ethical (ASCA, 2004) obligation to advocate for the academic, social and emotional well-being of every student, regardless of sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, ability, gender or gender identity/expression.

*LGBT.* A primary focus of this dissertation is on students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender. In the literature review and study, the terms *lesbian*, *gay*, and *bisexual* refer to sexual orientation while *transgender* or *trans* relates to gender identity and expression. Often regarded as an umbrella term, *transgender* describes people who identify with a gender different from the one assigned to them at birth and/or whose gender expression is non-conforming (Gay-Straight Alliance Network/Tides Center, Transgender Law Center & National Center for Lesbian Rights, 2004). While the needs of transgender and gender non-conforming students often differ from those of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) students (DePaul et al.,

2009), the overlap that exists both in the literature and in their shared experience of transgressing gender norms necessitates a review of scholarship that is inclusive of the entire acronym (i.e., LGBT). Within the context of this dissertation, “LGBT students” refers to LGBT youth in K-12 institutions. For research focused more narrowly on the experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual students, the acronym “LGB” will be used. Some of the scholars cited in the literature review use the acronym LGBTQ to include students who identify as *queer* or *questioning*. The former term—*queer*—is a term that has been re-appropriated by those whose identities push against norms of gender and sexuality while *questioning* refers to an individual who is in the process of sexual orientation and/or gender identity exploration (Singh & Gonzalez, in press).

*School climate.* School climate is a multi-dimensional term, incorporating various elements including interactions among members of the school community and students’ perspectives of safety (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). It is a reflection of the school’s norms, values, pedagogical practices, objectives, and broader organizational patterns (Cohen, et al., 2009).

*Social justice education.* Social justice education (SJE) is an interdisciplinary field in education that focuses on the dynamics of privilege and oppression that result in social inequality based on social group membership (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007). *Oppression* refers to a system that sustains social inequality at individual, institutional and cultural levels (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007). A more comprehensive review of SJE is examines in Chapter II.

*Race.* Within a social justice education framework, race refers to a sociohistorical and political construct that groups individuals together based on socially relevant aspects of their ancestry, physical appearance, ethnicity and/or cultural history (Adams, et al., 2007). Racial identities are legitimized and reinforced through a variety of political, cultural, and institutional

forces (Omi & Winant, 1994) that grant unearned privileges to individuals marked as White while sustaining the individual, institutional and sociocultural oppression of people of color (Bell, 2007; Hardiman & Jackson, 2007).

*Class.* While conceptualizations of socioeconomic class vary widely, they all describe a system of structural economic inequality. A social justice education approach to class analysis measures social class through various markers of socioeconomic status including wealth, education, occupation, and personal and political connections (Adams, 2013). Within the United States, race and class are, in many ways, inextricably linked. Communities of color face significantly higher economic disparities compared to their White counterparts (Oliver & Shapiro, 2006), the consequences of which impede access to a quality education, among other variables. More broadly, the issue of class across all identities positively correlates with school performance and level of schooling completed (Mantsios, 2007).

*Systemic change.* In order to be effective advocates for and with all students, school counselors are expected to adopt a systemic approach to advocacy, one that challenges norms, assumptions, procedures and policies through leadership and collaboration (ASCA National Model, 2005; House & Hayes, 2005). Under this new vision for school counseling, school counselors are trained to have a vast understanding of the systems and subsystems within schools and in the broader community—including parents, students, school personnel, and community organizations—and work within those systems to create effective and sustainable socially just change for all students (Brown & Trusty, 2005). Operating from a systemic framework allows school counselors to more effectively identify and remove barriers which may impede student success (McMahon, Mason & Paisley, 2009).

## **F. Personal Significance of Research**

My interest in this research study bears personal significance and stems from my academic, professional and personal experiences. As a former school counselor in the suburbs of Atlanta, Georgia, I worked with a diverse population of students at both the elementary and high school level. During this time, I developed a passion for and commitment to school counselor advocacy for and with all students, particularly those identifying as LGBT. While employed as a school counselor, I co-sponsored the school's Gay-Straight Alliance, facilitated LGBT-related trainings for educators, and integrated issues of sexual orientation and gender identity into my school counseling curriculum. Additionally, I helped secure protections for LGBT students and faculty in my former school district's anti-bullying and harassment policy.

Witnessing the positive impact of school counselor advocacy on both students and the broader school climate, I extended my efforts beyond the school level both in the United States and in Latin America. Specifically, I collaborated with lobbyists and congressional representatives to fight for policy changes at the local, state and national levels. Additionally, I co-founded Georgia Safe Schools Coalition (GSSC), an organization that targets anti-LGBT bias in K-12 schools through teacher education, youth empowerment, community involvement and legislative activism. While I do not currently practice as a school counselor, I continue to be actively involved with GSSC, am on the National Advisory Board for GLSEN, and serve as an international bullying prevention consultant for the Embassy of the United States in Chile, Peru, and Todo Mejora, a non-profit LGBT organization committed to cultivating safer schools for LGBT students in Latin America. Through my work with LGBT youth, I have become increasingly interested in further examining the role of school counselor advocacy for and with transgender and gender non-conforming students specifically.

Collectively, my theoretical and applied knowledge of school counselor advocacy for and with LGBT students as well as my training in SJE shape my conceptualizations of school counselor advocacy and reinforce my passion for this line of inquiry. As a scholar and educator operating within a SJE framework, I also acknowledge the impact that my Latina, heterosexual, cisgender and middle-class identities have in informing my research.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This study seeks to understand how high school counselors engage in advocacy for and with LGBT students and what factors motivate or prohibit their advocacy efforts. To ground the study, research from various bodies of literature related to school counselor advocacy and LGBT students will be investigated, synthesized, and analyzed using a SJE theoretical framework. The literature review is divided into two sections: school counselor advocacy and the experiences of LGBT students in high school settings, respectively.

Prior to examining the scholarship, an overview of SJE in general and as a lens of analysis in particular will be reviewed. The first section of the literature review will examine literature from the fields of counseling, school counseling, education, psychology and school psychology to explore the history and evolution of advocacy in school counseling in general and with regard to LGBT students; will investigate frameworks for advocacy in counseling and school counseling; will examine graduate education and professional development programs that teach general and LGBT-specific advocacy to current and aspiring school counselors; and will explore advocacy strategies used with LGBT youth. Finally, the first section of this literature review will explore scholarship specific to transgender and gender non-conforming students and look closely at traditional and reform models in the school counseling profession and various frameworks for counseling and school counseling advocacy competencies.

The second section will examine scholarship in school counseling, counseling, psychology, school psychology, and education related to the experiences of LGBT high school students in general while more closely examining the role of race, region and school setting, and gender identity on the experiences of LGBT high school students. Specifically, the second

section will investigate racial and regional differences in LGBT students' experiences, the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming students, and LGBT students' experiences with LGBT-friendly clubs, commonly referred to as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs).

### **A. Social Justice Education as a Theoretical Framework**

Linking theory to education and educational contexts, Anyon (2009) posits that, “theory allows us to plan research that connects the ways in which social actors and conditions inside of school buildings, districts, and legislative offices are shaped and changed by what happens outside the classrooms, offices, and official chambers they inhabit” (p.3). She further argues that theory reveals the broader social and political implications of what happens within educational institutions. To that end, Adams, Bell and Griffin (2007) contend that the aim of SJE as a theoretical framework in research and practice is to disrupt, resist, and transform oppressive conditions at the individual, institutional and societal/cultural level.

Central to the SJE theoretical framework is the concept of social justice. Bell (2007) posits that social justice is at once a process and a goal that cultivates the development of educational practices that support the exploration of intersecting forms of oppression such as racism, classism, ableism, heterosexism and transgender oppression. Indeed, the main goal of SJE is to advance social justice through education (Bell, 2007). Drawing from multiple disciplines—including intergroup education, critical pedagogy, multicultural education, black/ethnic studies, and women's studies (Adams, 2007), SJE has as its ongoing aim the development of communities that support all their members equally. Its overarching goal is the “full and equal participation in a society that is mutually shaped to meet [each individual's] needs” (Bell, 1997, 2007, p. 1).

Working toward the goal of social justice for all people necessitates a critical understanding of oppression as pervasive, restrictive, hierarchical, complex, intersecting, and internalized (Adams, et al., 2007; Bell, 2007). Specifically, the term “oppression” encapsulates the network of policies, practices, personal biases, and systems that perpetuate domination and subordination in virtually every aspect of our society (Hardiman & Jackson, 2007) and limit self-determination (Young, 1990). Equally important is the role of constructed social group identities and social locations in shaping individual and social groups experiences of privilege and disadvantage in an unequal society (Bell, 2007). Indeed, the interplay between privilege and disadvantage helps sustain systems of oppression. According to Hardiman and Jackson (2007), privilege is defined as “unearned access to resources (social power) only readily available to some people as a result of their advantaged social group membership” (Hardiman & Jackson, 2007, p. 59). Examples of privileged or dominant social identity groups in our society include White people, men, heterosexuals, Christians, and those who are temporarily able-bodied. Conversely, disadvantage impacts members of targeted social identity groups including people of color, people with disabilities, members of the LGBT community, and women by restricting access to resources and limiting possibilities for self-definition (Hardiman & Jackson, 2007). Additionally, members of targeted social identity groups are often subjected to violence and discrimination on the basis of their target identity or identities (Young, 1990).

SJE encourages scholars and practitioners to critically analyze systems of power and oppression at the individual, institutional, and societal/cultural levels (Adams & Love, 2005). Further, it carefully examines the various ways in which such structures manifest in schools and other social institutions and perpetuate hierarchical social group differences (Adams & Love, 2005; Hardiman & Jackson, 2007). Specifically, oppression at the individual level is related to



the attitudes or actions of an individual person and include bullying, harassment, and the use of racial slurs. At the institutional level, oppression manifests in institutions—including education, family, and government—that sustain and reinforce oppression (Hardiman & Jackson, 2007). The societal/cultural level of oppression refers to cultural guidelines which shape societal definitions of what is good, healthy, moral, and deviant. These cultural norms often “serve the primary function of providing individuals and institutions with the justification for social oppression” (Hardiman & Jackson, 2007, p. 19). In addition to occurring across three levels, oppression can be unconscious or conscious and can manifest as both a behavior and an attitude (Hardiman & Jackson, 2007).

Addressing issues of social exclusion and marginalization in schools is best addressed through the lens of SJE. In contrast to initiatives aimed at diversity and multicultural education which tend to focus exclusively on celebrating social group differences, SJE examines how differences in social group membership perpetuate inequity at the micro-, meso-, and macrolevels (Adams, et al., 2007). Simultaneously, an SJE framework encourages individual and collective action within and across social identity groups to change the systems that perpetuate injustice (Bell, 2007; Hardiman & Jackson, 2007), including collaborative relationships and dialogues across differences involving students and educators (Harro, 2007; Zúñiga, et al., 2014).

Further, SJE practice navigates policies, practices, and curriculum in ways that seek to empower—rather than oppress—students, school personnel, parents and other stakeholders. Central to SJE are theories and frameworks for individual, group and community empowerment, and liberation in addition to social justice tenets including the equal participation in society, the equitable distribution of resources and the physical and emotional well-being of all members of a school community (Bell, 2007). Specifically, SJE calls on educators to adopt pedagogical

practices that are collaborative, participatory, non-hierarchical and inclusive to the needs of all members of the school community (Adams, 2012). In the classroom, social justice education seeks to empower students to understand their personal experiences within an unequal social system that grants systemic privileges or disadvantages to individuals based on social group memberships (Bell, 2007; Love, 2000).

Central to teaching students about oppression and encouraging self-empowerment is the process of working toward liberation (Harro, 2010). Specifically, once students develop a critical understanding of privilege, oppression and the historic origins of structural inequality, they learn how to challenge injustice and move toward liberation and empowerment (Harro, 2010; Love, 2000). Drawing on the work of Paolo Freire (1970), Harro (2010) defines liberation as “critical transformation” (p.88) in which the “systemic assumptions, structures, rules, or roles that are flawed” (p. 88) are acknowledged and challenged in solidarity within and across social identity groups. According to Love (2000), liberation includes the development of a liberatory consciousness, the process of which “enables humans to live their lives in oppressive systems and institutions with awareness and intentionality” (p. 399). The goal of liberation necessitates collaboration and community building (Love, 2000; Harro, 2010). To that end, socially just schools strive for an inclusive and equitable environment, establish symbiotic community relationships, are systemic in their approach to change, and reflect SJE pedagogical practices in curriculum and instruction (Carlisle, Jackson, & George, 2006). SJE calls on educators to adopt pedagogical practices that are collaborative, participatory, non-hierarchical and inclusive to the needs of all members of the school community (Adams, 2012). Within the classroom, SJE seeks to empower students to understand their personal experiences within an unequal social system that grants systemic privileges or disadvantages to individuals based on social group

memberships (Bell, 2007; Love, 2000), encourage critical inquiry, and take social action (Carlisle, et al., 2006).

Social justice educators across disciplines, including school counselors, are committed to engendering socially just school environments and inspiring broader social change (Zúñiga, et al., 2014). For the school counselor of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, incorporating social justice principles into advocacy practice means increasing access for all students (Brown & Trusty, 2005); addressing social and educational inequities that may be rooted in issues of race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, class or ability status (Singh, et al., 2010); being a leader for systemic change; embracing a personal commitment to social justice; and using data to remove barriers that impede student success (McMahon, Mason, & Paisley, 2009). According to Hackman (2005), SJE encourages students and practitioners to be critical thinkers who take an active role in their learning process.

SJE is also a reflective practice (Bell, 2007) that calls upon practitioners to examine their multiple social identities and understand the ways in which they intersect and inform one another within the school and broader community. In short, the tenets of SJE are inherent in the school counselor's professional and ethical obligation to advocate for and with all students regardless of race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability status or other distinguishing characteristic.

More narrowly, an inclusive theory of oppression considers the ways in which group memberships, cultural contexts, and other social identities—such as race, class, gender, and ability status—impact how individuals experience their gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or transgender identity. For school counselors seeking to advocate for and with LGBT students, such a conceptualization means challenging oppression at the intersections of identity (Kumashiro,

2001) and at the micro-, meso-, and macro-level. To that end, school counselors who advocate for and with LGBT students must address all forms of oppression rather than simply “galvanizing around (one) marginalized identity” (Kumashiro, 2001, p. 5).

## **B. School Counselor Advocacy**

### **i. History of School Counseling**

The first documented school counseling program dates back to 1889 when a Detroit principal introduced a guidance curriculum that was later integrated into all the English classes at his school (Bauman, Siegel, Faico, Szymanski, Davis, & Seabolt, 2003). Urbanization and the industrial revolution during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century sparked increased demand for vocational guidance, a service provided by teachers for no additional pay (Aubrey, 1992). These teachers/vocational counselors helped prepare students to enter a changing workforce by guiding them through the process of selecting an appropriate career path, thereby closing gaps in services for students who otherwise may not have received assistance (Crethar, 2010). Over time, educational reform and social and political events further shifted and shaped the counselor’s role in schools (Gysbergs & Henderson, 2001). By the 1940s, vocational guidance came to include academic and emotional support and an emphasis on testing (Gysberg & Henderson, 2001). With the expanding role of counselors in schools, the field of school counseling officially became recognized as a profession in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century following the establishment of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) in 1952 (Bauman, et al., 2003).

Despite such recognition, school counselors were not employed in schools in large numbers until after the passage of the National Education Defense Act of 1958 and the Secondary Education Act of 1965, which were signed in response to the launch of the Russian space satellite Sputnik (Herr, 2002). The National Education Defense Act provided funds to train

and hire school counselors to help high-achieving students prepare for careers in the fields of math and science, tripling the number of school counselors between 1958 and 1967. In this new role, school counselors were encouraged to serve, not as advocates, but rather as gatekeepers in determining which students to prepare for a college education (Herr, 2002). During the majority of the 20<sup>th</sup> century school counselors were not included in school reform efforts (House & Hayes, 2002). By the late 1970s, a developmental approach to school counseling was gaining strength. Centered on providing developmentally appropriate counseling services to students of all ages, this approach emphasized the need for elementary school counseling programs and recognized college education as a reasonable option for all students (Gysberg & Henderson, 2001).

Concurrently, the broader field of counseling was beginning to consider the role of culture in the client-counselor relationship (Arrendondo-Dowd & Gonsalves, 1980; Ivey, 1987). This new emphasis on multiculturalism and multicultural competence ultimately led to the development of the Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCCs) (Sue, Arrendondo, & McDavis, 1992) as a means of guiding counselors in their work with diverse clients and students. Although their introduction marked a paradigm shift in the helping professions, the MCCs are limited in scope as they focus primarily on race, ethnicity and culture while largely ignoring the role of other social identities such as sexual orientation, gender identity, and class. More broadly, the Multicultural Counseling Competencies fail to adequately address issues of oppression, over-emphasizing the importance of micro-level interventions and paying minimal regard to larger systemic issues that impact clients' and students' mental health (Vera & Speight, 2003).

Despite its limitations, the MCCs served as a precursor for broader advocacy efforts to take root within the field of school counseling (Singh, 2010; Toperek, 2009). Prompted in part by this new focus on multiculturalism, a movement toward a comprehensive developmental vision for school counseling began to develop between the 1980s and 1990s. This new vision for comprehensive, preventative and advocacy-based school counseling emphasized the need for school counselors to serve as advocates, leaders and collaborators within the school. The Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI) in 1997 together with the implementation of the National Standards for School Counseling Programs (Campbell & Dahir, 1997) and the subsequent introductions of the ACA Advocacy Competencies and the ASCA National Model in 2003 further cemented the school counselor's role as systemic change agent and advocate for and with all students. Additionally, the ACA established *Counselors for Social Justice* as a new professional division in 1999 to underscore the importance of social justice issues—including advocacy—in counseling and school counseling.

## **ii. School Counseling Reform Models**

With their leadership training, systems perspective, and commitment to diversity, school counselors are well-positioned to serve as advocates for all students (Ratts, et al., 2007). Over the past two decades, the role of school counselor as advocate has increasingly become an essential component of student success and a keystone of the school counseling profession. Traditional school counseling models centered on reactivity and individual support but in recent years, the focus has shifted. Whereas traditional models often put the onus on the student to create change at the systemic level, reform models for school counselors highlight the importance of advocacy. Specifically, the Education Trust launched the Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI) in 1997. Most recently, ASCA developed the ASCA National Model (2005) to encourage

a comprehensive school counseling framework. Both models encourage school counselors to advocate for students by removing barriers that impede students' academic, social or emotional well-being (ASCA, 2005; Education Trust, 1997).

**1. Transforming School Counseling Initiative.** The 1990's marked a period of transition within school counseling (Toporek, Lewis, & Crethar, 2009). Central to this transition was a new vision for school counseling that regarded advocacy as its centerpiece. In 1997, the Education Trust launched a competitive grant process in an effort to change and improve the training of school counselors in universities across the country. The six universities that received funding from the Education Trust started an endeavor which came to be known as the Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI). This model called upon school counselors to push for educational equity, close the achievement gap for low-income students and students of color, work to remove barriers that impede academic success and advocate for all students' social, emotional and personal well-being (Perusse, Goodnough, Donnegan, & Jones, 2004). Consistent with a SJE framework, The Education Trust's TSCI envisioned the school counselor as a social justice advocate:

Transformed school counselors feel challenged by the principles of social justice to ensure that all students have access to a high-quality education. They know that merely doing the same thing for all students does not ensure equity. Transformed school counselors commit to ensuring that every student, regardless of race, color, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, receives a successful school experience that ultimately will increase their potential and positively affect their quality of life. Transformed school counselors examine their own behavior and...work for systemic change, giving the most to those who need the most. (The Education Trust, 2009)

The TSCI outlines 5 domains to ensure successful school counseling programs. The domains reflect a proactive, systemic approach to school counseling and include: leadership, advocacy, teaming and collaboration, counseling and coordination, and assessment and use of data (Sears, 1999). In addition to the five essential domains for school counseling programs, TSCI developed eight elements for change within graduate education, the purpose of which was to prepare school counselor trainees to become effective advocates. These eight elements include (1) criteria for selection and recruitment of candidates for counselor preparation programs; (2) curricular content, structure and sequence of courses; (3) methods of instruction, field experiences, and practices; (4) induction process into the profession; (5) working relationships with community partners; (6) professional development for counselor educators; (7) university/school district partnerships; and (8) university and state department of education partnerships.

A quantitative study by Perusse and Goodnough (2001) examined the degree to which The Education Trust's initiatives for transforming school counseling were addressed in counselor educators' coursework, including the school counselor's role as advocate for all students. The study also measured the extent to which counselor educators perceived such initiatives as essential to school counselor preparation. Surveys were distributed to entry-level school counseling programs nationwide. Of the 332 questionnaires mailed to counselor education programs, 195 were returned. Results found that counselor educators continued to focus on individual rather than school-wide concerns. For instance, counselor educators in this study rated school counselor preparation for brief counseling with individuals, families, and groups at the highest levels. Conversely, two of the three lowest-rated items contained the phrase "school-wide" and referred to using data as a means of addressing inequity and creating systemic change.



In a follow-up quantitative study, Perusse, Goodnough, Donegan, and Jones (2004), distributed a national survey to members from the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the National Association of Elementary School Principals. The survey assessed the extent to which survey responders believed the TSCI's five domains should be included in their school counseling programs. Brief counseling, programmatic leadership, and the implementation of a preventative school counseling program were among the highest rated items. Consistent with previous findings (Perusse & Goodnough, 2001), items associated with data and school-wide initiatives received the lowest ratings. Additionally, school counselors and principals in this study described the tasks of a school counselor in a similar manner, indicating that administrators may play a significant role in shaping the responsibilities of school counselors, including the extent to which they engage in advocacy.

While The Education Trust and other professional school counseling organizations have called upon school counselors to be agents for systemic change, findings from these studies (Perusse & Goodnough, 2001; Perusse et al., 2004) revealed a gap between ideal and actual practice. Results indicated that many school counselors and administrators have not yet embraced the school counselor's expanded role as advocate and leader for school reform, suggesting that calls for reform alone will not transform the school counseling profession.

**2. American School Counselor Association National Model.** In 2003, the Education Trust partnered with ASCA and several other organizations to develop the ASCA National Model. Comprehensive in scope, the ASCA National Model serves students across three domains: academic, social/personal and career. The overarching objective of all three domains is to improve academic success among students by asking, "How are students different because of

what school counselors do?” To answer that question, the ASCA National Model outlines a foundation, a management system, a delivery system and an accountability system for use by school counselors (Wittmer & Clark, 2007).

Integrating with the TSCI, the ASCA National Model places substantial emphasis on advocacy, which is included as one of the four themes of school counseling along with systemic change, leadership and collaboration (ASCA, 2005). Intended to serve as a framework for developing a comprehensive, developmental school counseling program, the ASCA National Model’s focus on advocacy and collaboration reflects many of the principles of SJE. In particular, the ASCA National Model concludes that school counselor advocates should work to (a) remove barriers that inhibit students’ success; (b) foster learning among students; (c) ensure equity and access to a quality curriculum; (d) collaborate with school personnel and other stakeholders to help meet the needs of all students, and (e) motivate positive, school-wide change. Most notably, the Model encourages school counselors to use data as a means of creating sustainable systemic change. Yet despite its emphasis on school-wide transformation, the ASCA National Model lacks a critical examination of systemic inequality and the impact of intersecting social identities on student achievement (Chen-Hayes, 2001). Additionally, an emphasis on personal reflection as a means to develop greater self-awareness and understanding of social justice issues is noticeably absent from the Model.

While the ASCA National Model extensively reviews the objectives of advocacy, it offers limited information regarding the process of advocacy and the role of school counselor as advocate (Trusty & Brown, 2005). Furthermore, additional research is needed to determine how and to what degree school counselors incorporate the ASCA National Model’s advocacy guidelines into their practice (Singh, et al., 2004).

### **C. Frameworks for Advocacy**

Motivated by the MCCs (Sue, et al., 1992), advocacy and social justice within counseling and school counseling began to take a more central role in the 1990s (Field, 2004). Specifically, the MCCs motivated a multicultural counseling movement that shed light on the role of culture, race and ethnicity on the therapeutic relationship (Ponterotto, Casas, Suzuki, & Alexander, 2010). Despite a focus on social identity and culture, earlier models of multicultural counseling in general and the MCCs in particular did not address the impact of multiple and intersecting identities—such as ability status, sexual orientation, class, and gender identity—on clients’ and students’ mental health. Additionally, the MCCs ignored the systemic injustices caused by oppression, thereby minimizing the essential role of advocacy in counseling and school counseling (Vera & Speight, 2003).

As the importance of counselor and school counselor advocacy became more evident, the American Counseling Association (ACA) introduced a set of competencies to guide both professional counselors and school counselors in their advocacy efforts (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002). Soon after, in 2005, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) outlined a more nuanced framework for use by school counselors specifically. Both the ASCA and the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Brown & Trusty, 2005; Lewis et al., 2002) call upon school counselors to serve as agents of social change within the school by engaging in advocacy at multiple levels. While the practice of advocacy is implicit in the early work of counseling pioneers Carl Rogers and Frank Parsons (McWhirter, 1997), the language of advocacy as used to describe the role of counselor and school counselor is a recent phenomenon. In particular, the more intentional use of the word “advocacy” in both literature and practice reflects a new vision of counselors and school counselors as agents of social and systemic change (Ratts, D’Andrea, &

Arredondo, 2004). Given such a significant shift, the frameworks reviewed in this section will focus specifically on models that uphold this vision of advocacy and social justice in both language and content.

**i. American Counseling Association (ACA) Advocacy Competencies**

According to the American Counseling Association's (ACA) Code of Ethics, counselors are professionally and ethically mandated to advocate for and with their clients and to address institutional or environmental barriers that inhibit client growth (ACA, 2005, A.6.a). In keeping with this obligation, the ACA approved a set of advocacy competencies for use by practitioners and school counselors in 2003 (Toporek et al., 2009), which further solidified the role of advocacy in the profession. The ACA Advocacy Competencies provide a social justice advocacy framework that school counselors can follow to effectively advocate for and with all students (Ratts et al., 2007). Reflecting the ASCA National Model's themes of leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systems change, the advocacy competencies can be used to incorporate social justice issues that address every student's academic, career, and personal/social development (Rubel & Ratts, 2007).

According to Adams, Bell & Griffin (1997), oppression manifests at the individual, cultural, and systemic level. To this end, Sue and Sue (2008) posit that effective school counselor advocacy for and with students from marginalized populations necessitates intervention at both the micro- and macrolevel. Likewise, the ACA Advocacy Competencies are designed to address injustice at the individual, school/community, and systemic level (Lewis, et al., 2002). In this sense, the ACA Advocacy Competencies can be used by school counselors as a framework for addressing issues of oppression in schools. Specifically, the ACA Advocacy Competencies provide an outline for addressing broader systemic issues—including bias or prejudice based on

sexual orientation or gender identity—while tending to individual concerns and fostering student empowerment (Crethar, 2009). Aimed at removing oppressive barriers to student success, the ACA Advocacy Competencies are rooted in principles of social justice that call upon school counselors to serve as systemic change agents within their schools and larger communities.

The advocacy competencies are categorized under two intersecting dimensions: extent of client’s involvement and level of intervention (Lewis, et al., 2002). These dimensions create three levels of advocacy: client/student advocacy, school/community advocacy, and public arena level advocacy (See Appendix E). Two domains and specific competency areas fall under each level of advocacy. Figure 1 illustrates the dimensions, levels and domains of advocacy included in the ACA Advocacy Competencies.

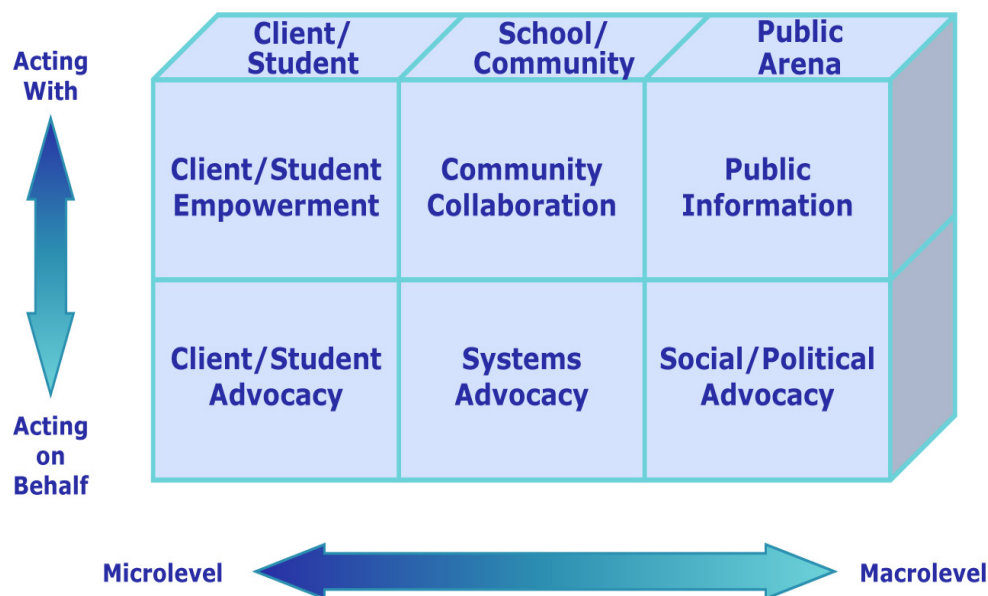


Figure 1. ACA Advocacy Competencies. Adapted from “Promoting Systemic Change Through the ACA Advocacy Competencies,” by R.L. Toporek, J.A. Lewis, and H.C. Crethar, 2009, *Journal for Counseling and Development*, 87, p. 267.

The domains under the level of client/student advocacy include client/student empowerment and client/student advocacy. The school community/level of advocacy is focused on the domains of community collaboration and systems advocacy. Finally, the two domains included in the public arena level are public information and social/political advocacy. School counselors engaging in advocacy at the client/student level use direct counseling, classroom guidance, and group counseling to empower students and serve as advocates at the individual level (Ratts & Hutchins, 2009). Further, school counselors advocating for and with students at the student level should be equipped with the foundational knowledge and skills necessary to help students identify and understand the social factors that impact their lived experiences as well as the systemic barriers that may impede their development.

The school/community level of advocacy underscores collaborative advocacy and systemic engagement (Lopez-Baez & Paylo, 2009). Specifically, school counselors are called to identify and develop alliances with community organizations who have the capacity to assist in areas such as professional development, research, policy, and school climate as a means of facilitating systemic change. In order to effectively engage in advocacy at a systems level—whether alone or in collaboration with a community organization—school counselors need to be skillful in analyzing systems and collecting and leveraging data to advocate for students. At the public arena level, school counselors inform the public about institutional barriers that impede student development and address issues of law and public policy. Information at the public arena level can be provided face-to-face in the form of an in-service training for a professional organization or through the use of technology, such as a blog.

The Advocacy Competencies allow school counselors to proactively address systemic concerns while tending to students' individual needs (Crethar, 2010). By including indirect and direct forms of action, the competencies provide a framework for school counselor advocacy at the micro-, meso-, and macro-level (Lopez-Baez & Paylo, 2009; Ratts, et al., 2007; Ratts & Hutchins, 2009; Toporek et al, 2009).

## **ii. American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Advocacy Competencies**

Following the introduction of the ACA Advocacy Competencies, Brown and Trusty (2005) presented a set of competencies specific to school counselors. These competencies are divided into three domains: (1) knowledge, (2) skills, and (3) dispositions. In order to be effective student advocates, Brown and Trusty (2005) contend that school counselors must possess a disposition (i.e., personal values and beliefs) for advocacy in addition to a base of knowledge and skills regarding the role and process of advocacy. A quantitative dissertation study by Parikh (2008) found that political ideology and “belief in a just world” (p. 50) determined social justice attitudes advocacy attitudes among school counselors and school counseling professionals. Similarly, a study by Nilsson and Schmidt (2005) found that political ideology and a disposition towards social justice may predict advocacy among graduate students in counseling. Results from both Parikh (2008) and Nilsson and Schmidt (2005) underscore Trusty and Brown’s assessment that advocacy dispositions are shaped by personal beliefs and values. However, limited scholarship related to personality characteristics and advocacy for and with LGBT youth (Graybill, 2011) demonstrates a need for additional research in this area. Table 1 categorizes the competencies according to the three domains: knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

Table 2.1: Advocacy Competencies for Professional School Counselors

<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>Skills</i>	<i>Dispositions</i>
Knowledge of resources	Communication skills	Advocacy disposition
Knowledge of parameters	Collaboration skills	Family support/empowerment disposition
Knowledge of dispute resolution mechanisms	Problem-assessment skills	Social advocacy disposition
Knowledge of advocacy models	Problem-solving skills	Ethical disposition
Knowledge of systems change	Organizational skills	
	Self-care skills	

*Source:* Brown & Trusty, 2005

From these competencies, Trusty and Brown (2005) developed a step-by-step model which outlines the advocacy process. After the source of the problem is identified, a plan of action is developed, implemented and subsequently evaluated in order to assess whether advocacy objectives were met. In creating the model, the authors drew on principles and strategies included in advocacy models for counseling (Eriksen, 1997), special education (Fiedler, 2000), and school psychology (Svec, 1990). Table 2 on the following page illustrates the model.



Table 2.2: A Model of the Advocacy Process for Professional School Counselors

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- Develop advocacy dispositions. Develop and clarify professional identity around advocacy dispositions. Having advocacy dispositions is motivating to the advocacy process, and advocacy dispositions help in making decisions of an ethical-legal nature.
- Develop advocacy relationships and advocacy knowledge. Build collaborative relationships with decision-makers and potential advocacy resource people and groups. Acquire knowledge of parameters, and gain an understanding of relevant systems within and outside the school.
- Define the advocacy problem. Gather data and other information to understand and objectively assess and define the advocacy problem and to aid advocacy efforts. Determine problem etiology and understand the problem in the context of systems.
- Develop action plans. Clear and specific plans of action should effectively utilize resources and anticipate difficulties. Be flexible unless an important moral principle is at stake.
- Implement action plans. Use problem-solving skills, communication skills, collaboration skills, dispute resolution mechanisms, and advocacy models for producing change. Monitor, organize, and manage advocacy efforts on various fronts. Ensure that agreed-upon changes are implemented. Promote and support collaborators and others as changes unfold and as setbacks occur.
- Make an evaluation. Evaluate the effectiveness of advocacy efforts by following up on changes and determining if needs are met. The problem assessment and problem definition should specify or imply appropriate evaluation criteria.
- Celebrate or regroup. If advocacy efforts are successful, recognize and reward contributions to success and empower all involved (including students and families) to become advocates for themselves and others. If goals were not reached, regroup and focus on support and coping.

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*Source:* Trusty & Brown, 2005

While the ASCA National Model (2005), ACA Advocacy Competencies (Lewis, et al., 2002), and ASCA Advocacy Competencies (Brown & Trusty, 2005) provide structured guidelines for advocacy engagement, limited empirical research offers insight into how school counselors can effectively incorporate such frameworks into practice (Singh, Urbano, Haston & McMahon, 2010). As such, additional research is needed to assess the impact of the above outlined frameworks on school counseling practice.

### **C. Advocacy Research**

Advocacy research within the broader context of education reveals a richer body of literature. (Fiedler, 2000; Svec, 1990). Most of the scholarship, however, has focused on academic advocacy (Jodry, 2001; Sutton, 1998) rather than social and emotional advocacy issues, such as those associated with improving school climate for LGBT students. In contrast, scholarship on counselor advocacy in general and school counselor advocacy in particular has been largely conceptual. Within school counseling scholarship, only five studies (Field, 2004; Fitch & Mitchell, 2004; Holmberg-Abel, 2012; Schaeffer, et al., 2010; Singh, Urbano, Haston & McMahon, 2010) explore the phenomenon of school counselor advocacy. This section will closely examine and critically analyze all four studies and investigate theoretical articles regarding advocacy within school counseling research. In addition, this section will look more narrowly at literature related to school counselor advocacy for and with LGBT students—both in practice and in graduate-level training—and the degree to which students’ intersecting social identities are considered.

While studies within education in general (Sutton, 1998) and special education in particular (Fiedler, 2000; Martin, Mitbaug, Cox, Peterson & VanDycke, 2009; Palladino, 2009) have contributed to advocacy scholarship, the largely academic focus of such research is beyond

the scope of this review. Given the aim of this dissertation, a review of advocacy scholarship in fields outside of school counseling—including school psychology and education—will be limited to the few studies about or involving LGBT students, particularly as they relate to strategies for fostering a more inclusive school climate. The bulk of this section will hence focus on school counselor advocacy literature, both in general and as it relates to LGBT students. Specifically, this section will be divided into three subsections: (1) advocacy research with LGBT students in K-12 settings, (2) school counselor advocacy in general, and (3) school counselor advocacy with LGBT students. The first subsection will review literature in school psychology, school counseling and education while the latter two will draw specifically from school counseling scholarship.

#### **i. Advocacy Research with LGBT Students in K-12 Settings**

Previous research has shown that LGBT-supportive school personnel positively impact the school experiences of LGBT students (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009; GLSEN, 2012; Harris Interactive & GLSEN, 2005; Kosciw, Kull, & Greytak, 2012). Nevertheless, many educators—including school counselors—are not adequately prepared to competently support and advocate for and with LGBT students (Goodrich & Luke, 2010; Luke, Goodrich, et al., 2011; Savage, Prout, & Chard, 2004). To address this competency gap, much of the LGBT-related advocacy scholarship within education and related disciplines has focused on the development and implementation of strategies to foster supportive environments for LGBT students.

Recognizing the need to move beyond individual advocacy as a means of motivating school-wide systemic change, more scholars (Chen-Hayes, 2001; DePaul, 2009; Graybill, et al., 2009; Singh, Orpinas, & Horne, 2010) are calling for a systems-centered advocacy approach to

address the structural manifestations of oppression and injustice in schools (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003). Such an approach—rooted in social justice principles—moves beyond fostering a “safe space” for LGBT and allied students to challenging gender and sexuality norms that foster a culture of disrespect (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Kumashiro, 2001). Five common advocacy-based strategies found in LGBT-student related scholarship reflect this broader systemic focus; they include incorporating LGBT issues into the curriculum, training school personnel, supporting LGBT-friendly clubs such as GSAs, including protections for LGBT students in existing nondiscrimination policies, and increasing the visibility of LGBT populations by displaying supportive resources in the school (Chen-Hayes, 2001; Gay-Straight Alliance Network/Tides Center, et al., 2004; GLSEN, 2012; Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010; Graybill, et al, 2009; Stone, 2003).

In particular, GSAs have been found to have a positive impact on LGBT students’ experiences of school climate, particularly when they actively challenge oppressive practices or institutional policies that sustain heterosexism and transgender oppression (GLSEN, 2012; Griffin, Lee, Waugh & Beyer, 2004). While some scholars have suggested that the implementation of advocacy strategies for and with LGBT students by school personnel is increasing (Bauman & Sachs-Kapp, 1998; O’Shaughnessy, Russell, Heck, Calhoun, & Laub, 2004), there is a paucity of existing empirical research that measures the effectiveness, frequency and nature of such strategies. Additionally Graybill (2011) has suggested that advocacy strategies for and with LGBT students may need to be tailored according to school setting (i.e., rural, suburban, and urban) and level of support from teachers and administrators.

A qualitative study within school psychology literature conducted by Graybill, Varjas, Meyers and Watson (2009) explored content-specific strategies that GSA advisors use to

advocate with and for LGBT students in school. Through semi-structured interviews, the predominately white participants provided insight regarding the various LGBT-related content (e.g., harassment, relationships, sexual orientation) that calls for advocacy engagement. Findings indicated that the types of advocacy strategies used by participants were dependent upon the content of the LGBT-related situation or remark. While responses varied depending on content and situational factors, the majority of strategies were reactive rather than proactive, suggesting that systemic advocacy interventions may be more difficult for school personnel to navigate. Overall, the study provided valuable information regarding potential factors that may facilitate or impede school personnel's advocacy efforts with LGBT students. Further investigation of this topic with a more diverse sample set will provide additional insight regarding the degree to which other factors—such as an adviser's gender, race or ethnicity—impact advocacy engagement. Additionally, exploring LGBT students' experiences at the intersections of other identities will yield a more comprehensive understanding of the factors impacting advocacy strategies.

Existing research (GLSEN, 2012; Russell & McGuire, 2008) has found that in order to effectively improve school climate for LGBT students, a fully inclusive comprehensive and enumerated anti-bullying and harassment policy is an essential first step. Such a policy clearly defines bullying and harassment and includes categories most often targeted such as sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, race, religion, and class. Additionally, implementation of comprehensive, enumerated policies has been associated with a more positive school climate for LGBT students (Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006; Kosciw, et al., 2012; Szalacha, 2003), particularly when students and school personnel are aware of their existence (GLSEN, 2012). LGBT-inclusive anti-bullying policies have been found to be related to a higher degree of

comfort and support among teachers and administrators (Schneider & Dimito, 2008). Additionally, according to findings from a study conducted by Hatzenbuehler and Keyes (2013), LGBT-inclusive anti-bullying policies may even reduce the risk of attempted suicide among gay and lesbian youth. Including various identity categories in educational policies aimed at protecting LGBT students—as enumerated policies do—allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse and often divergent needs of this population (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003). In order to be effective, enumerated, comprehensive anti-bullying and harassment policies must be properly implemented and enforced; further, school personnel should receive training on LGBT student issues as well as strategies for anti-bullying intervention (Jacob, 2013).

Integration of LGBT-related issues into curriculum remains one of the most under-researched topics in the literature on LGBT students (Griffin & Ouellett, 2002). Despite its documented benefits (GLSEN, 2012), curriculum inclusion of LGBT issues—still widely perceived as controversial—is seldom employed in pedagogical practice (GLSEN, 2011; Griffin & Ouellett, 2002). A GLSEN report (2012) drawn from previous quantitative research found that an LGBT-inclusive curriculum contributed to a more positive school climate for LGBT students, increased feelings of belongingness, and resulted in a higher degree of peer acceptance of LGBT people and issues. Findings also indicated that the overwhelming majority (86.6%) of students surveyed never attended any classes where LGBT people and issues were integrated into the curriculum. Additionally, only 11.7% of students reported positive representations of LGBT topics in their classes.

While policies, legal mandates, and inclusive curriculum are important steps in ensuring the safety well-being of LGBT students, effective enforcement necessitates a school staff that is well-equipped to competently address the needs of LGBT students (Goodrich & Luke, 2009;

Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Singh, 2010). Pre-service training for educators and helping professionals is an effective means to ensure the successful use of advocacy practices at the student, school, and community levels (Singh, 2010). A qualitative study in the school psychology literature by McCabe and Robinson (2008) examined how graduate students in education, school psychology and counseling were being trained to advocate for LGBT students in schools. The researchers used focus group methodology to understand participants' beliefs, attitudes and behaviors in addressing issues impacting LGBT students. Although their graduate programs emphasized the importance of social justice as part of their conceptual framework, participants reported limited competence regarding issues faced by LGBT students. The theory of planned behavior was used as a framework to analyze participant responses and, more broadly, to demonstrate how influencing attitudes and beliefs during pre-service training can lead to social justice advocacy in schools. Among the notable findings, participant responses to the issue of engendering social justice in schools did not include considerations for LGBT students; the subject was acknowledged by some—though not all—participants only when it was raised by investigators. Participants also felt they lacked the behavioral control to foster a positive school climate for LGBT students given that they perceived a lack of administrative support, a finding consistent with previous advocacy scholarship in the school counseling literature (Field, 2004; Singh, Urbano, Haston & McMahon, 2010). With regard to limitations, the results from this study are limited in generalizability and scope. Additionally, they did not address the extent to which other factors—such as race and class—impact school counseling trainees' perspectives of LGBT students. Nevertheless, findings provide insight regarding what educators and other helping professionals need to effectively advocate for LGBT students.

Similar to the McCabe and Robinson study (2008), research conducted by McCabe, Robinson, Dragowski, and Elizalde-Utnick (2013) investigated which factors were significant in determining educator intervention and prevention of anti-LGBTQ harassment. Specifically, a national sample of teachers, school counselors and school psychologists were surveyed about beliefs, attitudes, school culture related to LGBTQ students. In addition, participants were asked about perceived barriers to intervention with regard to harassment targeting LGBTQ youth. The questionnaire was shaped by the theory of planned behavior (TpB) which links attitudes to behavior. Findings indicated that the TpB's components—attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control—determined participants' behavioral intention to advocate for and with LGBTQ students. Among the three components, attitude was the most significant predictor of participants' intention to advocate for and with LGBTQ students. That is, educators who viewed advocacy as valuable expressed the strongest intentions to engage in advocacy. Subjective norm was the next best determinant of intention to advocate for and with LGBTQ students, underscoring the impact of colleagues, family, and friends on participants' responses to LGBTQ youth. The third component of the theory of planned behavior, perceived behavioral control, was not shown to be a significant predictor of intention to advocate. Despite the study's findings, the TpB did not demonstrate a strong connection between participants' intention to advocate for and with LGBTQ students and their actual advocacy behavior. Additionally, the vast majority (62%) of participants surveyed never or seldom engaged in advocacy for and with LGBTQ students. A study measuring counselor competence with lesbian, gay, and bisexual clients across practice settings yielded comparable results (Farmer, Welfare, & Burge, 2013). Specifically, participants reported the most competence in their attitudes toward LGB clients and the least competence in having the skills necessary to interact effectively with LGB clients.



Moreover, school counselors reported a level of competence considerably lower than that of counselors in other practice settings. Analogous to McCabe, et al. (2013), participants' attitudes toward LGB students did not predict their capacity to advocate on their behalf.

In addition to comprehensive training, the extent to which school climate change strategies are successful at creating change is dependent upon effective and engaged school leadership, supportive administrators, and community participation (Griffin & Ouellett, 2002; Kallestad & Olweus, 2003). A quantitative study by Graybill (2011) of GSA advisors' experiences found that among factors that facilitated their advocacy efforts, personal and professional support was the strongest. In contrast, the most significant obstacle to advocacy engagement among GSA advisors was lack of community support and resources, a finding consistent with previous research (Rienzo, Button, Sheu & Li, 2009). Graybill's (2011) findings indicated that factors which may impact advocacy efforts for and with LGBT students include local and state policies, availability and access to resources, and community size. Additionally, participants from rural areas reported more barriers to advocacy for and with LGBT students than those employed in suburban and urban school settings (Graybill, 2011).

Indeed, structural factors related to discrimination and prejudice significantly impeded advocacy efforts, particularly at the school and systemic level (Singh, et al., 2010). Conversely, Griffin and Ouellett (2002) found that LGBT-friendly adults and administrators perceived as credible by the school principal along with a supportive community facilitated the principal's role in fostering a safer and more affirming school climate for LGBT students. Consistent with LGBT school climate research, Griffin and Ouellett's (2002) research further indicated that fostering an affirming school climate for LGBT students necessitates intervention at the student,

school and community levels (Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010; Graybill, et al., 2009; Russell & McGuire, 2008; Szalacha, 2003; Toomey, et al., 2012).

## **ii. School Counselor Advocacy in General**

In recent years, scholars and leaders within the field of school counseling have pushed for advocacy to take a more central role in the profession, deeming it an ethical and moral obligation (Eriksen, 1997; Herr, 2002; House & Hayes, 2002; Lee, 2007; Ratts, et al., 2007). Prompted by calls for reform, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) integrated the Transforming School Counseling Initiative (1997) and ASCA National Model (2005), effectively making advocacy a centerpiece of the profession (Crethar, 2009). Despite such a significant shift in the field, advocacy-related scholarship in school counseling is still in its infancy; hence, existing literature is largely conceptual. To date, only five empirical studies have examined the phenomenon of school counselor advocacy (Field, 2004; Fitch & Marshall, 2004; Holmberg-Abel, 2012; Schaeffer, et al., 2010; Singh, Urbano, Haston & McMahon, 2010).

Field's study (2004) focused on school counselor advocacy in general rather than with a specific population. Field used focus group methodology with nine school counselors to explore how high school counselors define advocacy and the ways in which they practice advocacy on behalf of individual students. The study also investigated the process by which school counselors learned to become advocates. Findings from Field's study described advocacy as focusing on students, demonstrating specific advocacy behaviors and taking additional steps to assist students. Participants in Field's study exhibited student advocacy by offering support, writing letters, making phone calls, taking a stand, and working with individuals in positions of power. While participants identified behaviors that were essential for effective advocacy, their responses reflected a reactive approach to school counseling; that is, participants tended to respond to an

individual student after the problem had already existed for an extended period of time rather than taking steps to proactively change the systems that may have been inhibiting student success. As schools counseling reform models and frameworks for advocacy competencies have indicated, individualized and reactive interventions fall short of effective advocacy and systemic change (Lewis, et al., 2002). Results from this study also revealed that heavy caseloads, lack of support, and administrative responsibilities served as a significant barrier to school counselor advocacy.

Analogous to the research conducted by Field (2004), a mixed methods study by Holmberg-Abel (2012) investigated school counselor advocacy in general. Specifically, the study explored how school counselors view their role as advocates, the extent to which they perceived advocacy activities as valuable, the types of advocacy in which they had engaged, and the advocacy related training or education they had received. Data collection included a survey developed through the framework of the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Lewis, et al., 2002) and a focus group of seven school counselors. Qualitative results from the survey were classified according to six categories based on the ACA Advocacy Competencies' three levels and dimensions of advocacy. Findings demonstrated that while survey respondents viewed advocacy at all levels as valuable, they ranked advocacy at the public arena level as significantly less important than other levels of advocacy. Further, both survey respondents and focus group participants engaged in student level advocacy at a much higher frequency than the other levels. Findings also showed that survey respondents felt less equipped to engage in advocacy at the community/systems and public arena levels. Focus group participants, in contrast, did not feel sufficiently prepared to effectively engage in advocacy at any of the three levels outlined in the ACA Advocacy Competencies and indicated that they had received minimal training related to

advocacy. Additionally, many participants—from both the surveys and focus group—cited lack of support from faculty members and administrators as a barrier to advocacy. The impact of factors such as region of the country, school setting, and identity of students on advocacy efforts were not examined.

While Field (2004) and Holmberg-Abel (2012) examined the phenomenon of school counselor advocacy as a general concept, Schaeffer, et al. (2010) investigated it within a particular context. Utilizing qualitative research methodology, the study explored school counselor advocacy as it relates to creating college and university access for traditionally underrepresented youth. Findings revealed that all the school counselors who participated in the study worked diligently to encourage college access by providing services for students and parents and identified as advocates. Additionally, participants expressed that advocacy engagement for and with all students was essential to the role of school counselor and provided specific examples of strategies they had implemented to increase college access. They further agreed that disposition for advocacy was necessary in order to promote college access for underrepresented students. Participants described advocacy and advocacy engagement from an individual rather than systemic perspective, a finding consistent with previous research (Perusse & Goodnough, 2001).

Although participants in Schaeffer et al.'s (2010) study often collaborated with teachers, they seldom advocated for systemic change. This study identified a lack of education—both through professional development and in graduate programs—to train school counselors about advocacy, supporting previous findings about a lack of advocacy training in school counseling (Goodrich & Luke, 2009; Whitman, et. al, 2007). Overall, the study's results provided a better understanding of what school counselor advocacy looks like in practice, particularly as it relates

to marginalized students. Seeking the perspective of not only school counselors but also teachers and administrators allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of school counselor advocacy. Nevertheless, there were some limitations. The author contended that contextual factors influence school counselor advocacy; therefore, the phenomenon may manifest differently depending on the situation or environment. Furthermore, student perspectives were not included in this study. Future studies could consider incorporating this viewpoint to provide better information about students' perceptions of school counselor advocacy.

Looking at advocacy through the lens of social justice, Singh, Urbano, Haston and McMahon (2010) conducted a qualitative research study that used grounded theory as a methodology to examine strategies applied by 16 school counselors who had experience advocating for systemic change within their schools. Seven themes emerged from the data: the use of political savvy to operate within power structures, consciousness raising, initiating conversations that may be difficult or contentious, building intentional collaborative partnerships, teaching students to advocate for themselves, using data for marketing, and creating awareness about school counselor advocacy. Participants in the study agreed that social justice advocacy was political in nature; therefore, the process of creating systemic change was often difficult and controversial. Findings in this study underscored the need for additional social justice advocacy training in school counseling programs. One finding in particular was unique to the literature: the strategy to build intentional collaborative relationships. Participants emphasized the importance of working with supportive school personnel and community members and further acknowledged that coalition-building facilitates systemic change. The authors used the data to develop a checklist for school counseling programs to use during school

counselor social justice trainings. Identified limitations included lack of generalizability and researcher bias.

In order to better understand school counselor advocacy, it is important to investigate what factors facilitate and impede advocacy efforts. An advocacy-related quantitative study by Fitch and Marshall (2004) surveyed 63 mostly white female school counselors throughout Kentucky to assess and compare the roles and responsibilities of school counselors in high- versus low-performing schools. With regard to advocacy in particular, the study measured the degree to which participants perceived advocacy as essential to their role as a school counselor. Participants in lower-achieving schools were more likely to view advocacy as important; nevertheless, they did not spend more time on advocacy efforts than the participants in higher-achieving schools. In fact, participants in high-achieving schools spent more time on professional standards—such as use of data and development and organization of their counseling program—which have broader systemic advocacy implications (The Education Trust, 1997). Findings from this study warrant additional investigation regarding contextual factors impacting school counselor advocacy. The lower-achieving schools in this sample, for instance, were generally located in poorer, more rural areas than the higher achieving schools where school counselors had more time and resources to implement professional standards, including advocacy. Although this study provided answers to broad questions, qualitative research on this topic would provide a more nuanced depiction of school counselor advocacy in high- versus low-achieving schools. Additionally, a more heterogeneous sample set would reflect the more diverse experiences of school counselors.

#### **D. School Counselor Advocacy with LGBT Students**

At the time of this writing, there exists no empirical research on the topic of school counselor advocacy with LGBT students in K-12 settings. The limited conceptual literature within school counseling focuses largely on advocacy strategies that are social justice-minded and address LGBT advocacy at the micro-, meso-, and microlevels (Chen-Hayes, 2001; DePaul, et al. 2009; Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010; Goodrich & Luke; Singh, 2010). Although empirical studies in other disciplines have demonstrated the positive impact of such initiatives (GLSEN, 2009; GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2005; Lee, 2002), further research is needed to assess LGBT-related strategies within a school counseling context.

While pre-service advocacy training for counselors and school counselors is essential for competent execution of advocacy practices (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 2009), research shows that school counselors have not been trained to competently meet the needs of LGBT students (DePaul et al., 2009; Goodrich & Luke, 2009; Luke, et al., 2011). Not surprisingly, in a study regarding LGB students' perceptions of school climate, Varjas and colleagues (2006) found that LGB students viewed their school counselors as incompetent—and therefore inaccessible—in the areas of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. These findings are consistent with a national GLSEN survey (2009) of LGBT students which found that only 58.2% of LGBT students said they would feel comfortable speaking to their school counselor about issues related to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Related, a quantitative study (Fontaine, 1998) found that only 58% of the school counselors surveyed had knowingly interacted with an LGB-identified student. In order to effectively demonstrate LGBT-related competency in a way that links individual challenges to broader institutional issues, Toporek, et al. (2009) encouraged

counselor and school counselor training programs to address advocacy engagement systemically and across identity groups.

In particular, engaging in effective social justice advocacy for and with LGBT students requires multicultural competence across identity groups (Ratts, et al., 2009; Singh, 2010), particularly because the vast majority of school counselors are white, heterosexual, and cisgender (Chen-Hayes, 2001; Reynolds & Pope, 1991). As such, pre-service advocacy training specific to issues that impact LGBT students at the intersections of various identities is a professional and ethical necessity (Singh, Orpinas, & Horne, 2010). While school counseling literature related to LGBT student-related trainings is emerging, additional empirical scholarship is needed to further assess the impact of such trainings on school counseling practice specifically (DePaul, 2009; Goodrich & Luke, 2010).

Using qualitative and ethnographic methods, a study by Goodrich and Luke (2010) examined the experiences of eleven school counselors in training as they engaged in social justice group work with LGBT students within an introductory school counseling class. Findings demonstrated that the integration of social justice issues in participants' training increased their knowledge, skills, and awareness of LGBT issues. Additionally, experiential fieldwork with LGBT students in group settings allowed participants to challenge preconceived biases while fostering the competency and skills such work necessitates.

Focusing more narrowly on school counselor training, a mixed methods study of school counselor educators (Luke, et al., 2011) examined how and to what extent participants incorporated the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, and intersex (LGBTQI) students into school counseling curricula. Findings from a survey of 123 school counselor educators indicated that 91.9% of participants dedicated an average of one, three hour



session within a single course to LGBTQI student-related issues. Rather than teach skill development and advocacy implementation, however, results illustrated that participants focused on competency-related topics such as knowledge and awareness of sexual orientation and gender identity. Additionally, while the vast majority of participants addressed the needs of lesbian and gay students, issues specific to bisexual and transgender students were excluded from many of the school counselor educator curricula. These researchers also conducted semi-structured interviews with six school counselor educators and found that they also identified a lack of competence in adequately addressing the needs of transgender and bisexual students and acknowledged a need for additional resources specific to these populations. Analogous to the research of Goodrich and Luke (2010) and McCabe and Robinson (2008), this study did not examine the degree to which other factors—such as race and class—impacted trainees’ knowledge, skills and awareness of working with marginalized populations.

#### **D. The Experiences of LGBT Students in High School Settings**

To attain a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of LGBT students, this section will explore scholarship in the fields of education, psychology, school psychology, school counseling and counseling. The guiding questions in this part of the review are:

- 1) How do LGBT students experience their school climate?
- 2) How do school personnel interact with LGBT students?
- 3) To what extent does scholarship regarding LGBT students examine the intersection of social identities and geographical location on their experience of school climate?
- 4) How do the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming students compare to the experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual students?

These questions will provide a framework for attaining a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of LGBT high school students across identity groups. The vast majority of research on LGBT students focuses on their experiences in high school settings (GLSEN, 2012). Additionally, scholarship demonstrates that LGBT students in elementary schools face different challenges than those in middle and high school (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2012). For those reasons and in order to narrow the scope of this literature review, research articles will be limited to those focused primarily on LGBT public high school students. Due to the dearth of research on transgender students in K-12 institutions, this section will also examine research related more narrowly to the experiences of LGB students in high school settings.

#### **i. The Experiences of LGBT Students in General**

Recent events—including the brutal murder of gender non-conforming student Lawrence King (Simon, 2009) and the deaths by suicide of several young boys perceived to be gay—have called attention to the experiences of LGBT youth in educational settings, both publically and within academic circles. A growing body of literature indicates that students who identify or are perceived to be LGBT experience a more hostile school climate than those who do not (Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2005; D’Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002; DePaul, et al., 2009; GLSEN, 2012; Graybill, et al., 2009; Harris Interactive & GLSEN, 2005). Data from a GLSEN (2012) study of over 8,500 high school students found that 81% of LGBT respondents reported being verbally harassed. Results also showed that LGBT students are more likely to feel unsafe at school. Consistent with these findings, a national study of youth ages 13-18 found that LGBT students were three times more likely to feel unsafe at school compared to non-LGBT students (Harris Interactive & GLSEN, 2005). Ninety percent of LGBT students in the same

study experienced verbal and/or physical harassment related to some aspect of their identity (e.g., race/ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, ability, class), compared to only 62% of non-LGBT students.

Despite the challenges faced by LGBT students, the same GLSEN (2012) study showed that students who attended schools with supportive personnel reported less harassment and higher feelings of safety and school belongingness. Conversely, data reveal that school personnel seldom intervened during incidences of anti-LGBT bullying and harassment (GLSEN, 2012). There have also been reports that some school personnel actively participated in anti-LGBT verbal harassment and discrimination (GLSEN, 2012; Szalacha, 2003). A qualitative study of school and community service providers' responses to anti-LGBT bias indicated that many school personnel believe anti-LGBT bullying and harassment is not a "problem" because few—if any—LGBT students attended their school (Varjas, et al., 2007). Similar reports have been made by helping professionals across practice settings (Wornoff & Mallon, 2006), further indicating that LGBT students' needs are not being adequately met in many schools. Additionally, such misguided assertions may partially explain the infrequency of interventions on the part of school personnel, although further research is needed.

A negative perception of school climate related to anti-LGBT bullying and harassment has been shown to have a negative impact on academic performance and psychosocial well-being (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Kosciw, et al., 2012; Toomey, et al., 2012). Targets of anti-LGBT bullying reported more absences, lower academic achievement, lower graduation rates, and decreased feelings of school safety (GLSEN, 2012). Increased substance abuse (Garofalo, Wolf, Kessel, Palfrey & DuRant, 1998) and mental health difficulties (D'Augelli, et al., 2002) have also been associated with anti-LGBT bullying and harassment. A quantitative study

conducted by Kosciw, et al. (2012) found that while a hostile school climate negatively impacts LGBT students' well-being and academic performance, school-based supports— that is, GSAs, supportive school staff, inclusive curriculum, and LGBT-inclusive anti-bullying and harassment policies—contribute to the engenderment of a safe and affirming school climate for LGBT students. While all four school-based supports examined had a positive influence on LGBT students, supportive school personnel had the most significant impact on academic outcomes and self-esteem.

While the challenges LGBT youth face at school are well-documented, they remain resilient in the face of adversity (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Russell, 2005). More than ever before, LGBT students are actively engaged in challenging the hegemonic structures that perpetuate heterosexism and transgender oppression in their school environments (Griffin, Lee, Waugh, & Beyer, 2004). Specifically, many LGBT students serve as leaders through their involvement in LGBT-friendly clubs, such as GSAs, aimed at fostering a more affirming school climate for all students. (Gay-Straight Alliance Network/Tides Center, Transgender Law Center & National Center for Lesbian Rights, 2004; GLSEN, 2009; Griffin, et al., 2004; Lee, 2002; Szalacha, 2003).

Despite recent efforts on the part of researchers and educators to address issues impacting LGBT students, the vast majority of existing empirical scholarship focuses on White youth in general and White gay male youth in particular (Russell & Truong, 2001). Much less is known about the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming students (D'Augelli & Grossman, 2001; Johnson, Singh & Gonzalez, 2014) and LGBT students of color (Griffin, et al., 2004; McCready, 2001). Another topic seldom discussed in literature regarding LGBT students' experiences of school climate is the role of context (i.e., region of the country and school

setting); yet is one that should be considered in school counselor advocacy and LGBT student-related research as it may impact the degree to which school counselors and other educators can serve as advocates for and with LGBT students and may provide additional insight regarding racial and socioeconomic differences in the school experiences of LGBT students. The sections that follow will review literature on LGBT students, as it relates specifically to the unique experiences of LGBT students of color and transgender and gender non-conforming students. Regional differences regarding the experiences of LGBT students will also be explored.

## **ii. Racial and Regional Differences in LGBT Students' Experience of School Climate**

LGBT students are not a monolithic group. Indeed, they come from a variety of class, religious, and racial/ethnic backgrounds, ability levels and regions of the country. LGBT students who are members of other socially marginalized groups (e.g., people of color, female, poor or working class, people with disabilities) face unique challenges that often magnify the negative effects of heterosexism (Brooks, 1981; Toomey, et al., 2012). While LGBT students are a diverse population, the vast majority of research on LGBT students is drawn from a predominately White sample set (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009; Russell & Truong, 2001). This lack of diversity generalizes the experiences of White LGBT students across all races and ethnic groups while minimizing the reality of white privilege among LGBT youth (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003). There exists a dearth of scholarship addressing how intersecting marginalized identities impact the experiences of LGBT students; the few studies available focus primarily on race and, to a lesser extent, class and geographical differences. Additionally, scholarship that explores the lives of LGBT students of color seldom investigates the intersection of race/ethnicity with sexual orientation and gender identity and their compounding impact on school experiences, although this is starting to change (Kosciw, Greytek, & Diaz, 2009; Pascoe, 2007; Rosario, Schrimshaw,

& Hunter, 2004; Russell & Truong, 2001). In addition to race, class, and regional differences, special considerations for international LGBT students must also be taken into account, as they face a unique set of challenges. According to Oba and Pope (2013), LGBT international students must contend with their sexual identity, relationship issues, lack of knowledge about sexual health, and resistance when returning to their home countries.

A quantitative study by Harris Interactive and GLSEN (2005) found that Black and Latino students reported more frequent experiences with anti-LGBT bullying and harassment than their White counterparts. Similarly, an earlier study on gay male adolescents (Edwards, 1996) found that Black gay adolescent males are more likely to experience anti-gay victimization from their heterosexual peers than gay adolescent males from other racial/ethnic groups. An ethnographic study (Pascoe, 2007) conducted at a racially diverse, working class suburban high school revealed that anti-LGBT rhetoric was heard more frequently among White youth than students of color. Additionally, the anti-LGBT epithet “fag” was more commonly used by White males to refer to other gender non-conforming White males or those perceived to be gay (Pascoe, 2007). Such findings support previous literature linking the perception of LGBT identity to Whiteness and White culture (Greene, 2000; Loutzenheiser, 2001) in which identification with the LGBT community connotes a distancing from racial or ethnic group membership (Greene, 1998).

Drawing on data from the 1995 National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health, Russell and Truong (2001) investigated the school attitudes and experiences of LGB students of color and the impact of sexual orientation on their self-esteem; the responses of LGB students of color were then compared to those of White LGB students. Data indicated that the impact of sexual orientation on the attitudes and school experiences of LGB students of color across all

racial and ethnic groups was not statistically significant when compared to heterosexual students of color. Conversely, sexual orientation intragroup differences among White LGB students were significant. Specifically, White LGB students reported negative attitudes and experiences of their school climate compared to their White heterosexual counterparts. Additionally, White LGB respondents were more likely than other racial/ethnic groups to report feeling unsafe at school; they also experienced the strongest perceptions of prejudice, followed by Latinos, Asians and Blacks. While these results were contrary to what the researchers expected, they suggested that sexual orientation differences among White LGB students may indicate that sexual orientation is more salient for White students, many of whom have little or no experience being a member of a marginalized group (Russell & Truong, 2001). Similarly, many LGB students of color feel more connected to their racial/ethnic identity (Greene, 2000; Singh, 2010) which may explain why sexual orientation did not make a difference in the school experiences and attitudes of LGB students of color in this study. With regard to self-esteem, however, LGB students of color reported lower self-esteem than heterosexual students of color. LGB White students also reported lower self-esteem compared to their White heterosexual counterparts. Additional research is needed to further examine the experiences of LGB students of color, as the findings from this study are inconsistent with existing scholarship. While the results did not specify the factors contributing to the lowered self-esteem, previous research has suggested that negative perceptions of school climate linked to anti-LGBT bullying and harassment have a negative impact on the psychosocial and emotional well-being of LGBT youth (D'Augelli et al., 2002; Rivers & Noret, 2008).

A study conducted by Rosario, et al (2004) found that fewer LGB Black and Latino students were “out” to their peers and family members. Data from this study also indicated that

LGB Black youth were less comfortable being open with others about their sexual orientation than their White counterparts. Black youth in the study were engaged in fewer LGB-related social activities, a finding reflected in previous research (McCready, 2001). A possible explanation may be that LGBT students of color often experience difficulty identifying with a group that has historically been viewed as White and westernized (Greene, 2000; Singh, 2010). Similarly, they may perceive identification with the LGBT community as a rejection of their own racial or ethnic background (Greene, 1998).

Using data from GLSEN's 2007 National School Climate Survey, a report compiled by Diaz & Kosciw (2009) focused specifically on the responses of over 2,000 LGBT middle and high school students of color. In addition to survey results, the report includes qualitative data from students' own experiences. Substantiating GLSEN's previous research on the general population of LGBT students (GLSEN, 2008), data from this study indicated that LGBT students of color are most frequently harassed as a result of their sexual orientation or gender expression. For all racial and ethnic groups of LGBT students of color, more than 80% of students reported being verbally harassed in the past year because of their sexual orientation and 60% for gender expression; the percentage for harassment based on sexual orientation was slightly less for Black and Asian students. Harassment as a result of race or ethnicity was also common among LGBT students: Black (51%); Latino/a (55%); Asian/Pacific Islander (55%); Native American (43%); and multiracial (59%). Across all racial/ethnic groups represented in the sample, being a numerical racial/ethnic minority at their school was associated with greater safety issues, particularly around race and ethnicity.

Students who experienced severe harassment as a result of sexual orientation and race/ethnicity were significantly more likely to miss school than those who reported severe



harassment based solely on sexual orientation (57% and 43%, respectively), supporting previous claims that lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) students of color are at higher risk for victimization as a result of their multiple marginalized identities (Hunter, 2001; Kumashiro, 2001). Overall, multiracial students experienced the highest rates of anti-LGBT bullying and harassment (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009). Comparing the responses of LGBT students of color to the original sample set of 7,200—which included White respondents—demonstrated similar experiences regarding anti-LGBT bullying and harassment, feelings of safety and staff interventions to incidences of bullying and harassment.

In addition to racial differences among LGBT students' experiences of school climate, findings from this study (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009) revealed regional variations. Specifically, incidences of anti-LGBT harassment were significantly higher in the South for LGBT Native American students; in the Midwest for Asian/Pacific Islander students; and in the West for African American students. No significant regional differences regarding anti-LGBT harassment existed for Latino/a and multiracial students in the survey. With the exception of Latino/a students, all LGBT students of color in the Northeast were less likely to report verbal harassment related to race/ethnicity than those who resided in other regions of the country.

Differences based on school setting were also noted. Overall, survey results indicated that schools in small towns and rural areas were more hostile toward LGBT students of color than those in urban and suburban communities. A possible explanation for such findings could be that people in smaller towns traditionally have more socially conservative beliefs related to LGBT issues (Yarbrough, 2003). Additionally, LGBT youth residing in rural communities often have fewer supportive adult role models and less access to LGBT-friendly resources and community organizations (O'Connell, Atlas, Saunders, & Philbrick, 2010; Yarborough, 2006), which can

exacerbate feelings of alienation. Indeed, LGBT community organizations are virtually non-existent in rural communities (Graybill, 2011).

Findings from a national study conducted by GLSEN (2012) also indicated that the school experiences of LGBT students in rural areas are more negative than urban and suburban LGBT students. Utilizing data collected from the 2011 national survey of LGBT students' perspectives of school climate, GLSEN examined the responses of 2,300 LGBT students who attended rural schools. Results indicated that LGBT students who attended schools in rural areas expressed feeling less safe than those attending schools in suburban and urban areas. Region of the country also played a factor in LGBT students' perceptions of safety. Specifically, the data revealed that rural students in the South and Midwest felt less safe on average as a result of their sexual orientation than students who lived in rural areas in the West or Northeast and were more likely to miss school as a result. The data also showed that rural LGBT students were more likely to hear anti-LGBT language and report unjust policies or procedures than LGBT students in urban or suburban areas.

A quantitative study related to the perceptions of rural school personnel regarding lesbian, gay, and bisexual students (O'Connell, et al., 2010) found that educators in rural areas hold significantly less positive opinions of LGB students than any other marginalized student populations. Findings also indicated that the mostly White school personnel who were surveyed responded less favorably to items associated with students of color than items related to gender and disability. Among school staff surveyed, school counselors were the most likely to attend workshops, discuss LGB-related matters with co-workers, and provide support to LGB students (O'Connell, et al., 2010).

A study by Kosciw et al. (2009) regarding the impact of context on LGBT students' experiences of school climate yielded similar findings. Specifically, the study (Kosciw, et al., 2009) investigated the impact of context on school climate for LGBT students in general and found that LGBT students in rural communities and those who attend schools with higher poverty levels are more likely to experience a negative school climate. Inconsistent with GLSEN's results (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009), however, this study (Kosciw, et al. 2009) indicated that LGBT students—both White and of color—in urban areas and rural communities, perhaps due to lower than average educational attainment by adults, were also more likely to report incidences of anti-LGBT harassment.

Data from the broader National School Climate Survey (GLSEN, 2008), from which Diaz and Kosciw (2007) drew the LGBT students of color sample, indicated that LGBT students across all races and ethnicities who reside in the western United States experience a more positive school climate compared to students in the rest of the country; they also reported a higher incidence of teacher and staff intervention during incidences of anti-LGBT bullying and harassment (GLSEN, 2008). Similarly, Fetner and Kush (2008) found that GSAs, known to improve school climate (Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010; Lee, 2002), were more common in the West and Northeast.

### **iii. The Experiences of Transgender and Gender Non-conforming Students**

Despite increased efforts to address issues impacting LGBT students in general, research specific to transgender and gender non-conforming students is scarce (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2009; Johnson, et al., 2014). Additionally, existing literature on LGBT students tends to focus mostly or solely on sexual orientation without considering the impact of intersecting marginalized identities, namely gender identity/expression (Toomey, McGuire, & Russell, 2012).

While the challenges faced by LGB and transgender students often overlap, gender non-conforming students have unique needs that require additional attention on the part of both researchers and practitioners (DePaul, et al., 2009; Luke, et al., 2009; McGuire, Anderson, Toomey & Russell, 2010).

Increased victimization among gender non-conforming youth is well documented (D'Augelli, et al., 2006; Grossman, et al., 2009). A recent survey conducted by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN, 2009) found that 87% of transgender student respondents reported experiencing verbal harassment in the past year as a result of their gender expression while two-thirds felt unsafe at school. Survey data also showed that school personnel seldom intervene when they witness anti-transgender bullying or harassment. A mixed-methods study using data from surveys and focus groups (McGuire, Anderson, Toomey & Russell, 2010) yielded similar findings. Specifically, survey results indicated that 82% of transgender student respondents reported hearing negative remarks based on their gender expression “sometimes or often” while only 25% said that school personnel intervened when anti-transgender incidences of bullying or harassment occur. Overall, transgender students reported increased psychological distress and reduced feelings of safety as a result of harassment (McGuire, et al., 2010).

While emerging research exists on the broader experiences of transgender youth (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; McGuire & Connover-Williams, 2010; Welle, Fuller, Mauk, & Clatts, 2006), this literature review will focus primarily on scholarship involving transgender and gender non-conforming youth in school settings specifically. Research regarding transgender and gender non-conforming students is largely conceptual and focuses primarily on developing strategies to improve the school climate for this population (Chen-Hayes, 2001; Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010; Singh & Burnes, 2010). Chen-Hayes (2001), for example, outlined a set of

strategies including examining one's ideas and assumptions about gender, using correct pronouns, pushing for inclusive student non-discrimination and anti-bullying policies, and ensuring that transgender resources and literature are available to students and faculty members. Similarly, a piece by Gonzalez and McNulty (2011) explored four specific strategies to guide school counselors in collaborative advocacy with transgender and gender non-conforming students: effective messaging, student empowerment, educating school personnel, and legislative and community collaboration. These strategies, based partially on the personal experiences of the authors, applied the recently developed American Counseling Association Competencies for Counseling with Transgender Clients (ACA, 2009) to transgender and gender non-conforming students through the framework of the community collaboration and systems advocacy domains outlined in the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Lewis et al., 2002). Additionally, Singh (2010) has suggested that school counselors hold small "gender chat" groups where LGBT and questioning students are afforded the opportunity to explore issues related to gender identity and expression (Singh, 2010), as the two identities often overlap (Blackburn, 2007).

Despite emergent conceptual literature regarding strategies to foster more affirming school climates for transgender and gender non-conforming students, only one study to date measured the role such strategies have in predicting students' perceptions of safety for gender non-conforming students (Toomey, et al., 2012). Using multilevel modeling techniques, researchers in this study surveyed 1415 student participants in 28 racially diverse middle and high schools. Participants included both LGBT students and self-identified heterosexual allies. Of the participants surveyed 16% reported incidences of bullying or harassment based on their gender expression. Findings indicated that male and transgender students reported feeling less safe as a result of gender non-conformity than their cisgender female counterparts. Additionally,

lesbian, gay and bisexual students reported more gender-based harassment than heterosexual students, substantiating previous research on the intersecting nature of sexual and gender identities (Blackburn, 2007).

Researchers took into account racial differences in perceptions of school safety for gender non-conforming students, noting that Latino students perceived the school climate as less safe for gender non-conforming males. Older students, bisexual students, and those who had experienced school violence also perceived male gender non-conforming students to be less safe. Overall, female gender non-conforming students were perceived as more safe than their male counterparts; that being said, older youth and gender non-conforming youth perceived female gender non-conforming students as less safe compared to the other students surveyed. Consistent with previous research, findings indicated that schools with an LGBT-inclusive curriculum and GSA are perceived as safer for male gender non-conforming students. While such findings contribute to scholarship and practice, they are limited by methodology. Qualitative interviews with a subset of participants would have allowed for a more nuanced explanation of the variability in school safety perceptions while providing a richer perspective on the part of the student participants. Additionally, other factors—such as class and ability status—were not included in the demographic information.

Research indicates that students who attend schools with an LGBT-inclusive curriculum report less anti-LGBT bullying and harassment (Russell, Kostroski, McGuire, Laub, & Manke, 2006). Specific to gender identity, a conceptual piece within the education literature (Rands, 2009) called on teacher education programs to prepare educators to teach and discuss gender in ways that take into account the needs of transgender and gender non-conforming people. The author introduced the “gender oppression matrix”, a new framework for conceptualizing gender

privilege and oppression. This model considers the intersections “gender category oppression”—traditionally known as sexism—racism, and “gender transgression oppression” which refers to the oppression faced by transgender and gender non-conforming people. Rands (2009) examined three existing forms of gender education—gender-stereotyped education, gender-free/gender-blind education, and gender-sensitive education—and proposed an alternative which she deems “gender complex education.” Contrary to more traditional forms of education which tend to sustain gender stereotypes and reinforce the gender binary, gender-complex education encourages teachers to “work with students to analyze at the micro level the ways in which gender is constantly being socially constructed in the classroom as well as macro-level influences on this process” (Rands, p. 426, 2009). Finally, Rands (2009) examined ways in which educators and teacher educators can challenge their critical thinking about gender and adopt a more complex conceptualization of gender in education that addresses the intersection of other social identities.

Although recent scholarship seeks to foster increased awareness and understanding of transgender and gender non-conforming students, only one study to date focused specifically on collaborative research with this population. A qualitative study conducted by Johnson, Singh and Gonzalez (2014) using the participatory action methodology collective memory work examined how transgender youth made sense of their sexual orientation and gender identity during high school. Part of a broader research project on LGBT youth, the study consisted of nine young adult participants. Of the nine participants, five identified as White while the remaining four identified as African American. With regard to gender identity, 3 of the participants identified as genderqueer or bigender and six identified as trans men. Researchers collected data through the use of focus groups and written narratives. For the written narratives,

participants were asked to write about one positive and one negative experience related to their sexual and gender identity development.

Three main but intersecting themes emerged from the focus group data, each lifted from participants' own words: (1) "It's complicated": A need for resilience; (2) "You should be able to be safe"; and (3) "This is what action looks like!" Specifically, participants described their experiences with gender and sexual identity during high school as "complicated" and complex, referring to their own self-understanding and that of their friends and classmates. Examples included having to distinguish between sexual orientation and gender identity. Also common to each participant was a negative perception of their school climate. Participants described their high school as largely hostile spaces that did not allow for gender fluidity, impacting them both academically and socially. Finally, participants offered suggestions for making schools safer, more affirming spaces for transgender and gender non-conforming students such as supporting transgender-inclusive clubs, allowing for more critical discussions and expressions of gender, and providing transgender students access to safe bathrooms. Following the study, participants' oral narratives were compiled into a feature-length documentary for use as an educational tool for teachers, administrators and community members.

From a social justice perspective, this study highlighted the benefit of including participant voices—particularly youth voices—in research methodology, providing a more comprehensive understanding of transgender youth and creating a framework for subsequent action. The documentary also reflected a medium through which marginalized voices can be used to create social change. Despite its strengths, the study was not without its limitations. Although the sample set was racially diverse, researchers did not specifically address the role of race on participants' perceptions of their gender and sexual identity development. Additionally,



participants who responded to recruitment requests possessed the means with which to access online recruitment tools, potentially excluding participants whose socioeconomic status may not have allowed for such access.

#### **iv. Resilient & Empowered: LGBT Students' Experiences with Gay-Straight Alliances**

GSAs are student-led, student-initiated non-curriculum school clubs that address LGBT and allied student issues and foster a safe and affirming environment for all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression (Griffin, et al., 2004). Although the purpose of a GSA varies across schools depending on students' needs, the primary functions are to provide support and counseling; to have a safe place to meet; to create awareness about LGBT issues; and, more recently, to work toward positive school-wide systemic change (Griffin, et al., 2004; Russell, et al., 2009).

Among the various strategies employed to improve the school climate for LGBT students, GSAs are considered to be one of the most common and effective methods (Szalacha, 2003). A growing body of research (GLSEN, 2009; O'Shaughnessy, Russell, Heck, Calhoun & Laub, 2004; Russell, et al., 2009) has documented the positive impact that GSAs have on school climate, even for students who do not identify as LGBT (Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010). Specifically, the presence of a GSA is associated with a greater sense of school belonging and a decrease in verbal and physical harassment (Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer 2006; Szalacha, 2003). Consistent with these findings, data from a longitudinal study (Lee, 2002) of seven students who were active members of their high school's GSA indicated that membership in the club was related to an increased sense of school belonging and a higher comfort level with their sexual orientation. Involvement in GSAs has also been linked to improved academic achievement and school attendance (Walls, et al., 2010), more positive relationships with school

personnel and other adults in their lives (Lee, 2002), and has been found to have a positive impact on psychological well-being (Heck, Flentje, & Cochran, 2012). Additionally, students at schools with GSAs are less likely to hear anti-LGBT remarks and report a higher feeling of safety; LGBT students at GSA schools, therefore, are less likely to miss school because they fear for their safety (GLSEN, 2012). A quantitative study by Heck, et al. (2012) found that by decreasing rates of anti-LGBT bullying and harassment and increasing feelings of school belonging, GSAs may offset risk behaviors associated with LGBT students, including depression and alcohol and drug abuse.

A study evaluating the Safe Schools Program for Gay and Lesbian students (Szalacha, 2003) in Massachusetts found that students who attended schools with GSAs reported hearing fewer anti-LGB comments in school on a daily basis than those who attended schools without a GSA (57% compared to 75%). The study, which collected data from 1,646 students in a stratified random sample of 33 schools, also found that students in GSA schools could think of at least one faculty member who was supportive of LGB students (52% to 36.9%, respectively). Additionally, students at schools with a GSA reported feeling more comfortable referring a questioning friend to the school counselor than students at schools without a GSA (63.6% compared to 44%). Other studies have yielded similar findings (O'Shaughnessy, et al., 2004; Russell, et al., 2009). Yet despite the documented effectiveness that GSAs have on improving the school climate for LGBT youth, various studies have found that the sustainability and effectiveness of such improvements rely on broader institutional efforts to change school-wide policies, practices and programming (Griffin et al., 2004; Griffin & Ouellett, 2002; Ouellett, 1999). Consistent with the school/community level of the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Lewis, et al., 2002), school counselors and other school personnel can support the empowerment and

resiliency of LGBT students by working with them—through mediums like GSAs—to remove the institutional barriers that impede systemic change (Singh, 2010).

While the benefits of GSAs on LGBT students and their allies are well-documented, only 22% of high schools nationwide have an established GSA (GLSEN, 2008). Overall, students residing in rural areas, small towns and the South are the least likely to have access to a GSA (GLSEN, 2008). Consistent with these findings, Fetner and Rush (2008) found that schools located in urban and suburban areas and schools in the Northeast and West were more likely to be early adopters of GSAs. Additional research is needed to more closely examine the impact of GSAs on students of color and other marginalized student populations, students in rural areas, and students residing in the South.

While a vast body of literature supports the effectiveness of GSAs on LGBT and allied students, little is known about the broader impact that GSAs have on other marginalized student populations and to what extent such clubs address intersectional issues including racism and classism (Kumashiro, 2001). By focusing solely on one marginalized identity (e.g., sexual orientation and, to a lesser extent, gender identity), GSAs may alienate those—such as LGBT students of color and students with disabilities—who are navigating multiple marginalized identities (Loutzenheiser, 2001; McCready, 2001). For instance, research has found that LGBT students of color and students who were questioning their sexual orientation and/or gender identity did not always feel that GSA membership provided the support they were seeking (Griffin, et al., 2004; McCready, 2001). Furthermore, many youth of color struggle with having to “choose” one marginalized identity over another (Varney, 2001); for them, issues of race or ethnicity may be more salient. In schools where GSAs are racialized or viewed as predominately White clubs, LGBT or questioning students of color may feel even more isolated, particularly if

intersections of LGBT identity are not acknowledged (McCready, 2001). GSA advisors and other school personnel—including school counselors—were encouraged to be careful not to view or treat the racial/ethnic identity of LGBT students of color as an appendage of their sexual or gender identity (McCready, 2001) and to work to challenge the culturally-specific narratives regarding LGBT identity, especially those that cause working-class students, students of color and/or students with disabilities to feel excluded from more mainstream GSAs.

A national GLSEN survey (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009) found that 36% of LGBT students of color attended a school with an LGBT-friendly club, such as a GSA, roughly the same as the general population of LGBT students (36.3%). When establishing a GSA or similar club, Kumashiro (2001) has suggested examining who the club or program excludes or harms, ensuring that the “safe space” is safe for *all* students. In particular, immigrant, questioning and working class youth have unique needs that are not met in more conventional LGBT-friendly clubs such as GSAs (Varney, 2001). Questioning youth, for instance, may require an environment where they can explore questions of sexual and/or gender identity as they “can be easily scared away in an atmosphere where sexual propositions are the norm” (Varney, p. 101, 2001). Even the term “Gay-Straight Alliance” has been viewed by some as excluding bisexual, transgender, questioning students, and children of LGBT parents as the title is not inclusive of entire LGBT acronym (Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010).

### **E. Summary and Discussion of Literature Review**

In this chapter, scholarship related to school counselor advocacy and the experiences of LGBT high school students was examined, analyzed using an SJE theoretical lens and synthesized in order to better understand the role of school counselor as advocate for and with this population. This literature review has called attention to the unique needs and challenges of

LGBT students across identity groups and the role school counselors increasingly play in advocating for and with them to create a more affirming and inclusive school climate. All students deserve to be educated in a safe and supportive environment, and school counselors are charged with helping to engender such a context. Understanding the unique needs of LGBT students across identity groups can help school counselors provide this critical component of a truly comprehensive and social justice oriented program. This literature review of both school counselor advocacy and the experiences of LGBT high school students demonstrated a dearth of research on school counselor advocacy in general and almost none as it relates to LGBT students specifically, underscoring the need for additional research about school counselor advocacy with this population.

The research summarized above indicates that school counselor advocacy, in both practice and research, should focus on addressing the broader systemic issues—such as those central SJE—that perpetuate oppression in schools at the individual, institutional and cultural levels. Such a perspective, rooted in social justice principles, considers the interplay between students and their school climate while positioning school counselors as agents for systemic change (Ratts, et al., 2007). While aims to improve school counselor knowledge and awareness of LGBT student-related issues are an important first step, effective social justice education-based advocacy requires skill development and a thorough understanding of the impact of meso- and macro-level factors on a student's micro-level experience. To that end, the ACA Advocacy Competencies consider the relationship between students and their environment (Ratts, et al., 2007), allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the individual, institutional and cultural factors that contribute to an oppressive school climate. Additionally, the ACA Advocacy Competencies enable school counselors to recognize their role in navigating and challenging the

hierarchical structures that perpetuate injustice. Similarly, a social justice education framework—one that considers the impact of intersecting levels of social oppression on LGBT students at the individual, institutional, and societal/cultural levels (Hardiman & Jackson, 2007) and aims to empower students to advocate for themselves and with each other— provides a more nuanced understanding of students’ experiences and create opportunities for more wide-reaching, sustainable change. Applying the ACA Advocacy Competencies through the rubric of SJE offers a more systemic approach to advocacy with emphases on social identity, collaboration, and student leadership.

In order to better understand the unique challenges faced by LGBT students across identity groups, scholarship related to LGBT students must reflect the complex variations in their experience. Specifically, school counselor advocacy research related to LGBT students needs to take into account the ways in which cultural contexts and other social identities, such as race and class, impact how students navigate their gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or transgender identity. For example, while school setting plays an important role in LGBT youth perceptions of school climate, it is a factor seldom considered in LGBT-student related scholarship (Kosciw & Greytak, 2009) and may provide further insight regarding racial and socioeconomic variations in the multifaceted experiences of LGBT students, two identities often linked to region and school setting (McCready, 2001). More narrowly, significant research is required to better comprehend the impact of students’ multiple marginalized identities on school counselor advocacy with LGBT students.

One way to begin filling the gap is by examining the experiences of school counselors who have served as advocates for and with LGBT students. Such research would provide crucial

insight into the phenomenon of school counselor advocacy in general and as it relates to LGBT students across identity groups and in a variety of settings.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS AND PROCEDURES**

This chapter first presents the purpose of the study and describes the research design and methodology, including the rationale for the design and my role as the researcher. In addition, the pilot study that informed the dissertation are reviewed and site and participant selection are addressed. Methods for data collection and analysis as well as steps to ensure trustworthiness are discussed and limitations for the study are explored.

#### **A. Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of high school counselors in the southeastern United States who have served as advocates for and with LGBT students across identity groups, with a specific focus on race and class.

#### **B. Rationale for Qualitative Design**

A qualitative research design was used for this study. The overarching objective of qualitative research is to obtain a deeper understanding of human or social behavior (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research takes a nuanced approach to inquiry, one that allows the researcher to develop a multifaceted and comprehensive understanding of phenomenon. Specifically, a qualitative methodology "...analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). Additionally, a qualitative approach focuses on participants' perspectives and allows participants to construct meaning from their experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In this study, participants were asked to make meaning of school counselor advocacy for and with LGBT students across identity groups by reflecting on their personal experiences working with this population in urban, rural, and suburban school settings.



Within qualitative research, conceptual frameworks are often used to shape and inform the problem statement, research questions, and interview protocol (Merriam, 2009). As indicated in Chapter I, the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Lewis, et al., 2002), shaped by a social justice lens, were used as a conceptual framework to guide this qualitative study in order to better understand how school counselors engage in advocacy for and with LGBT students across identity groups at the student, school and public arena levels (Lewis, et al., 2002). This framework informed the conceptualization of the problem statement, research questions and interview protocol (See Appendix C) and deductively guided the process of data collection. Conversely, data analysis—discussed more thoroughly in a subsequent section of this chapter—combined both deductive and inductive analysis of the data. Conducting a qualitative study that was both inductive and deductive in its design allowed for a more detailed understanding of how high school counselors engage in advocacy for and with LGBT students across identity groups and in various school settings.

More broadly, a qualitative approach to inquiry afforded me the opportunity to ask probing questions (Creswell, 2007) for additional clarity and provided a more complex constructed understanding of racial, class, and contextual differences in school counselor advocacy for and with LGBT students. Additionally, a qualitative design was best suited to this study due to the scarcity of empirical research regarding the practice of school counselor advocacy in general and with this population specifically.

#### **i. Role of the Researcher**

Qualitative methodology positions the researcher as the principal instrument of data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998). As an “instrument” of research in a qualitative study, the researcher interacts directly with participants and the data are subsequently mediated through

the researcher. Such a role required me, as the researcher, to examine personal biases and assumptions that motivated my research topic, influenced my choice of methodology and guided my analysis of the data (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). Within a SJE framework, this included acknowledging my own subjectivity, salient social identities, biases, and social location as a researcher and engaging in a critically reflexive process of the role that my experiences and values as a social justice educator, safe schools activist, and former school counselor advocate for and with LGBT students have in shaping my conceptualization of school counselor advocacy with this population. Additionally, I examined the ways in which my social identities as a cisgender, Latina, heterosexual middle class woman impacted and informed data collection and analysis.

### **C. Pilot Study**

Related to this dissertation proposal, a pilot study refers to a smaller version of a full-scale study (Holloway, 1997). A pilot study for this dissertation was conducted in 2013 in accordance with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) policy for the University of Massachusetts Amherst in order to assess the adequacy of the qualitative interview questions (Baker, 1994). The sample size for the pilot study consisted of three school counselors. The study took place at two high schools in the southeastern United States, one urban and one suburban. Participants were drawn from two schools—one urban and one suburban—in order to explore varying perspectives on advocacy and to more closely examine contextual differences, primarily those related to school setting. The first site, Southern High School, was located in an urban setting and had a 70% graduation rate in 2012. Of the 1400 students enrolled during the time of the study, 55% were African-American, 18% were Latino, 7 % were Multiracial, 2% were Asian and the remaining 22% were White. Approximately 70% of the student body received free or reduced

lunch. Southern High School's school counselor-to-student ratio was approximately 1:350. The school counseling department was also staffed by a full-time graduation coach and department secretary.

The second site, Northern High School, was located in a suburban setting, served approximately 2,650 students, and had a graduation rate slightly over 96% at the time of the study. Approximately 79% of students were White, 8% were African-American, 6% were Latino, 5% were Asian and 2% were Multiracial. Additionally, six percent of students received free and reduced lunch. The school counselor-to-student ratio at Northern High School was 1:530. Within the school counseling department at Northern High School, students were also served by one graduation coach, one person in charge of testing for newly enrolled students, three secretaries, and one records coordinator.

Criterion sampling (Creswell, 2007) was used to identify and subsequently select participants; that is, the high school counselors chosen for this study met the predetermined criteria of having served as advocates for and with LGBT students. School setting was also considered in selecting participants in order to examine and compare the experiences of high school counselors who worked in both urban and suburban settings.

Semi-structured interviews were the primary source of data collection in the pilot study (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, a document review of school records was conducted to provide an objective and comprehensive depiction of the racial/ethnic and socioeconomic compositions of the student body at each school. Semi-structured interviews were used to better understand the lived experiences of high school counselors who have served as advocates for and with LGBT students (Merriam, 2009). An interview protocol informed by the research questions helped shape the questions and direct the interview (Bigdan & Biklen, 2007). Probes were used to gain

more detailed information and obtain clarification from participants (Merriam, 2009). All interviews were audio-recorded; data from the recordings were transcribed, coded and analyzed.

Data analysis of interview content was continuously reexamined throughout the study. Interview data was carefully coded and grouped into categories as themes were identified. The research questions, conceptual framework and literature helped shape the initial coding scheme. Additionally, theoretical perspectives, and my personal beliefs influenced which codes were applied (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Five thematic categories emerged from analysis of the data: (1) education as advocacy, (2) social/political advocacy, (3) school climate change, (4) student empowerment, and (5) personal commitment. While the first four thematic categories reflect existing literature and the ACA Advocacy Competency Domains (Lewis, et al., 2002), the fifth—personal commitment—emerged as a unique category within the data. Although participants in this study expressed a desire to be more proactive in practicing advocacy with LGBT students, they described their advocacy behaviors as both reactive and proactive, individual and systemic. They also defined advocacy as collaborating with school personnel and members of the community and viewed student advocacy as a professional and ethical obligation. With regard to factors facilitating advocacy, participants in this study underscored the importance of supportive colleagues and administrators, though only two of the three participants described their respective school climates as supportive and affirming of LGBT students. Additionally, findings from the pilot study indicated that contextual factors—such as school setting—may have impacted the extent to which participants advocated for and with students in general and LGBT students in particular. While not included as a thematic category, findings from the pilot study demonstrated that participants expressed less knowledge of issues related to transgender and gender non-

conforming students and did not take steps to integrate transgender issues into the curriculum. Finally, participant responses from the pilot study indicated that LGBT students who are navigating multiple marginalized identities face additional challenges, a finding consistent with previous research (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009; Hunter, 2001; Kumashiro, 2001).

The pilot study generated important findings that contributed to more robust dissertation research. For the dissertation study, data collection methods were expanded to include a more comprehensive document review, the details of which are included in the “data collection” section of this manuscript. Responses generated from the interview protocol effectively addressed the research questions and the conceptual framework. As such, the interview protocol was replicated with minimal amendments. Specifically, because “personal commitment” emerged as a unique thematic category, probes were added to question 7a) to assess what factors sustain participants’ advocacy efforts for and with LGBT students. For purposes of clarity and to obtain additional information regarding participants’ experiences with advocacy at the systemic and community levels, question 8c) was changed from “What facilitates your advocacy efforts in the community?” to “What networks have you established in the community? How do those networks facilitate your advocacy efforts, if at all?” To generate a more nuanced understanding of the factors that facilitate and inhibit participants’ advocacy efforts, the following questions were added as a probe to question 8c and 8d, respectively: “How does the complex role and function of school counselor impact your capacity to advocate for and with LGBT students?” and “To what extent—if at all—do school, district, and statewide policies on LGBT students impact your practice?”. In addition to these changes, I remained open to amending interview questions throughout the process of data collection -- although no alterations were ultimately made and the interview protocol remained the same throughout data collection for the dissertation.

## **D. Setting and Participants**

### **i. Gaining Entry and Informed Consent**

This dissertation study was conducted in accordance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) policy for the University of Massachusetts Amherst. While most school counselors were contacted independently for participation, one of the districts from which I recruited school counselors required an application for approval. After completing the required paperwork, I was granted permission to interview school counselors within that particular school district. Subsequent to obtaining permission, a description of the study along with my contact information was emailed to school counselors by a district representative. As a result, two school counselors were drawn from that particular district. The remaining 10 participants were recruited independently and therefore did not require approval from their districts. All participants were given two informed consent forms, one to sign and return to me researcher and one for their own records (See Appendix D).

### **ii. Participant Recruitment**

Email notices to statewide school counseling and educational listservs in the southeastern United States, including a letter of recruitment (See Appendix A) and a description of the study were the primary method of participant recruitment. I also posted a call for participants on *ASCA Scene*, a networking site for school counseling professionals. Additionally, a description of my study was sent to paid and volunteer staff members at non-profit organizations such as statewide “Safe Schools Coalitions.” Follow up with staff members was made via email. Finally, I conducted an extensive internet search of high schools with GSAs or LGBT-friendly clubs and identified clubs that were co-sponsored by a school counselor. School counselors who met this criterion were then sent a letter of recruitment and information about the study via email. It

should be noted that during my exhaustive search for high schools with GSAs or LGBT-friendly clubs across the southeastern United States, I only found two high schools in rural counties with such clubs, neither of which involved participation on the part of a school counselors. Because rural school counselors could not be recruited through their involvement with GSAs, I directly contacted over 80 high school counselors in rural counties across the southeastern United States and included an invitation to participate in the study should they meet the required criteria. Of the more than 80 school counselors contacted, only two responded and subsequently participated in the study.

After potential participants were determined, I contacted them individually to further discuss the purpose of the study, review recording and consent procedures, discuss time commitment, and confirm participation. Additionally, participants were asked to complete and submit a demographic questionnaire (See Appendix B) to provide information regarding their race, age, sexual orientation, and gender identity. This information guided participant selection in order to obtain a diverse sample set that includes participants across age, races, sexual orientations, and gender identities. While specific social identities were not included as part of the criteria for participation, my goal of obtaining a more diverse sample was intended to aid my decision process should the number of potential candidates exceed the target number. Consequently, the number of qualified candidates did not exceed the target number and while I purposefully reached out to school counselors of color, only one participated in the study; the remaining 11 participants identified as White.

Prior to the interview, follow up was made by phone or via email to coordinate interviews and to collect a document review of materials related specifically to participants' advocacy

efforts for and with LGBT students, the details of which will be discussed in the data collection section of this chapter. To protect confidentiality, participants were given pseudonyms.

### **iii. Rationale for Participant Selection and Site Location**

The settings for this study were 12 high schools across 10 school districts and three states in the southeastern United States in order to explore diverse experiences and contextual differences. Criterion sampling (Creswell, 2007) was used to identify and subsequently select participants; that is, the school counselors chosen for this study met the predetermined criteria of having served as advocates for and with LGBT students.

Participants were selected from urban, rural and suburban settings in the southeastern United States as means of more closely examining the variability of school counselors' experiences. Due to difficulty in recruiting rural school counselors who both met the criteria for this study and were willing to participate, only two of the twelve participants were employed at a rural high school. Of the remaining 10 participants, six worked in suburban schools and four in urban. Outreach to school counselors of color also posed a challenge. While the study lacked diversity among participants, the racial and ethnic demographics of schools at which participants were employed ranged from 82% White students to 94% students of color. Socioeconomic composition among the schools also yielded a diverse range, between 5% and 86% free and reduced lunch.

Among participants, years of experience as a school counselor ranged in length between two and 27 years. Seven of the participants identified as women and seven as men. With regard to sexual orientation, four of the participants—three of whom were men—identified as gay or lesbian; none were cisgender or bisexual. The remaining seven participants were heterosexual. Participants ranged in age between 31 and 57. Nine of the 12 participants worked in school



districts with an LGBT-inclusive student policy. For the purposes of this study, an LGBT-inclusive student policy refers to a district-level anti-bullying and/or harassment policy or a non-discrimination policy that is inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students.

Participants were not asked about non-discrimination policies related to faculty and staff.

One of the participants, Brad, was employed in a district that included policy protections for students on the basis of sexual orientation but not gender identity and gender expression. An overview of participants' demographic information and years of experience as well as a table related to the demographic composition of students for each participant's school can be found in Appendices F and G, respectively. Detailed participant profiles are included in chapter IV.

## **E. Data Collection**

Dissertation study data were collected in two ways: (1) semi-structured interviews and (2) a document review. The study was guided by previous scholarship, the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 1, the pilot study, and the following research questions:

- 1.) How do school counselors define advocacy within the framework of school counseling?
- 2.) How do school counselors advocate for and with LGBT students across identity groups?
- 3.) How do school counselors describe factors that facilitate and impede advocacy for and with LGBT students?

### **i. Interviews**

Interviews were the primary means for data collection. Specifically, semi-structured interviews were used to better understand the lived experiences of school counselors with LGBT students (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). An interview protocol (See Appendix C) informed by the

research questions, conceptual framework, and the pilot study was used to shape the questions and direct the interview. Probes were used to gain more detailed information and obtain clarification from participants (Creswell, 2007). The exact order and precise wording of the questions was left open and the length of each interview lasted between 45 and 70 minutes. Prior to beginning the interviews, participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire specifying their age, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and years employed as a school counselor (See Appendix B). All interviews were audio-recorded; data from the recordings was then transcribed, coded and analyzed. Table 3.1 presents the research questions and their correspondence to questions in the interview protocol.

Table 3.1: Research Questions and Correspondence to Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
a) How do school counselors define advocacy within the framework of school counseling?	5,6, 7b, 9
b) To what extent do school counselors advocate for and with LGBT students across identity groups?	7, 7a, 7b, 7c, 9, 9a, 11, 11a, 12, 12a
c) How do school counselors describe factors that facilitate and impede advocacy for and with LGBT students?	7c, 8, 8a, 9a, 12a

Table 3.2 on the following page illustrates the connection between the research questions, interview questions, the ACA Advocacy Competency Domains (See Appendix E), and the specific intersecting identities addressed.

Table 3.2: Interview Questions and Relation to Research Questions, ACA Competency Domains, and the Intersecting Social Identities Addressed

<b>Interview Question</b>	<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>ACA Advocacy Competencies</b>	<b>Intersecting Social Identities Addressed</b>
1	n/a	n/a	n/a
2	n/a	n/a	n/a
3	n/a	n/a	n/a
4	n/a	n/a	n/a
5	Question a	Student, school, public arena	n/a
6	Question a	Student, school, public arena	n/a
7	Question b	Student, school, public arena	n/a
7a	Question b	n/a	n/a
7b	Questions a & b	Student, school, public arena	n/a
7c	Questions b & c	Student, school, public arena	n/a
8	Question c	Student	n/a
8a	Question c	School, public arena	n/a
9	Question a & b	Student, school, public arena	n/a
9a	Question b & c	Student, school, public arena	n/a
10	n/a	n/a	Race, class status
11	Question b	Student	Race, class status
11a	Question b	Student	All identities
12	Question b	Student	Transgender specifically
12a	Questions b & c	School, public arena	n/a

## ii. Document Review

In addition to semi-structured interviews, I conducted a document review using various data sources. The document review consisted of three components: (1) records outlining the racial/ethnic and socioeconomic student composition for the school at which each participant is employed; (2) information about LGBT student-related state, school, and district policies that were relevant to each participant, specifically those associated with LGBT-inclusive anti-bullying and harassment and/or student non-discrimination; and (3) participant copies of guidance curriculum and other personal school counseling artifacts addressing LGBT issues in schools. The latter provided further insight regarding each participant's advocacy practices while the former two components, accessed electronically through public records, offered additional information about the role of context in school counselor advocacy for and with LGBT students across identity groups. Specifically, a review of school demographic records allowed for a more objective depiction of the student body at each school; policy information specific to LGBT students at the state and district level expanded my understanding of each participant's school climate and its potential role in facilitating or inhibiting school counselor advocacy for and with LGBT students.

## **F. Data Analysis and Management**

Data analysis for qualitative research is a continuous process that begins during data collection and continues immediately upon the study's completion and numerous times after the data have been reviewed and the interviews transcribed (Galman, 2013). Consistent with this approach, data analysis of interview content was continuously reexamined throughout the study. Through this rigorous and ongoing process, data collection and analysis symbiotically informed each other. During participant interviews, I took mental notes of emerging themes in their experiences. Immediately following the interviews, I wrote research memos to record my

thoughts and interpretations (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and to attend to personal biases and assumptions.

Once the data were collected, I took several steps to organize and manage the data. Interview transcripts and relevant documents were copied and saved electronically in a password-protected email account. Additionally, I developed an inventory of my data set. In order to protect confidentiality of participants, I kept all interview transcripts, informed consent forms, memos, email correspondence and related documents in a locked filing cabinet, labeled according to a code assigned to each participant. Audio recordings of interview content were transferred to my password protected computer and copies were sent to my email account; the memory from the audio recording device was erased once files were transferred.

After transcribing the 12 participant interviews, I reviewed each of the tapes and followed the transcript to ensure accurate transcription of interview content. I took a dialectical approach to data analysis (Galman, 2013), using both inductive and deductive reasoning to shape the coding scheme. Specifically, open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was used during the initial phase of data analysis to inductively review and code the transcripts as a means of “opening up” the data to uncover underlying meanings and overarching themes. During this phase of data analysis, I examined the transcripts line-by-line to establish codes that were reflective of participants’ experiences. I kept memos throughout the process of open coding to track my analytic progress, strengthen my categories, and address possible gaps within each category (Charmaz, 2006). Additionally, research questions, the conceptual framework and previous scholarship helped shape the initial coding scheme. Preliminary codes included words, phrases, or overarching concepts that emerged as relevant after data were openly coded.

Following open coding, I used the conceptual framework to analyze the data as a means of determining whether and to what extent participants demonstrated advocacy for and with LGBT students across identity groups and at what level (i.e., student, school, public arena). In addition, I made note of which of the advocacy competencies were being employed most frequently and by whom. After this initial analysis, a second analysis was conducted to establish broader categories. A third and final analysis identified developing themes that may not have fit within the original conceptual framework, including advocacy behaviors not included in the ACA Advocacy Competencies.

After thematic categories were established, axial coding was used to conceptually connect categories of data to their subcategories and to determine the ways in which overarching categories might be associated with one another (Strauss, 1987). Subcategories answer questions about the overarching category such as “when, where, why, who, how, and with what consequences, thus giving the concept greater explanatory power” (Strauss, 1987, p. 125) and represent how the analyst derives meaning from the data (Charmaz, 2006). The thematic category of “systems advocacy”, for example, included “navigating structural barriers”, “use of data”, and “establishing safety”. Each of the subcategories for “systems advocacy” helped illustrate the ways in which participants engaged in advocacy at the systemic level for and with LGBT students.

To the extent possible, I used constant comparative analysis (Glasser, 1965) to compare the interview data from participants in the same school settings and then between school settings to obtain a comprehensive description of their experiences as advocates for and with LGBT students. Throughout the process and as additional themes were identified, I remained open to

new codes and groups and frequently referred to my research memos for additional guidance and clarity.

### **G. Steps to Ensure Trustworthiness**

In order to ensure trustworthiness, a variety of data collection techniques were used including semi-structured interviews and a document review. I also kept a self-reflective journal during data collection and wrote research memos during data analysis (Charmaz, 2006). The journals and research memos allowed me to bracket assumptions and judgments about schools counselor advocacy for and with LGBT students, particularly as the phenomenon related to each participant's experiences. From a SJE perspective, the self-reflective journals and research memos provided an outlet through which I could explore the impact of my biographies and social identities on the research process (Rossman & Rallis, 2000) while keeping track of my "presuppositions, choices, experiences, and actions" (Mruck & Breuer, 2003, p. 3). Additionally, I relied on triangulation techniques (Merriam, 1998) to further strengthen the validity of my findings by comparing multiple sources of data, transcripts, and research memos.

Throughout the research process, I consulted regularly with my dissertation advisor and committee members to ensure proper methodology. I also worked with a competent peer debriefer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to review the application and evolution of my research methods as well as to ensure that my content was accessible to readers outside school counseling and SJE disciplines. As someone whose expertise was not within the school counseling field, the peer debriefer provided a valuable outsider's perspective which assisted me in further examining personal biases and assumptions related to the research topic in general and the findings in particular. Finally, participants were given the opportunity to review the interview transcripts for



accuracy and given the option to clarify, add to, or underscore any points they made during the interview.

## **H. Summary**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of high school counselors in the southeastern United States who have served as advocates for and with LGBT students across identity groups, with a particular focus on race and class. The chapter commenced by presenting the research design and rationale for the design. In addition, the methodology and my role as the researcher were described. Chapter III also reviewed the pilot study that informed the dissertation and addressed site and participant selection. Finally, methods for data collection and analysis as well as steps to ensure trustworthiness were addressed.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS**

Chapter IV details the findings that emerged from an analysis of twelve semi-structured interviews and a document review including (1) records outlining the racial/ethnic and socioeconomic student composition for the school at which each participant is employed; (2) information about LGBT student-related school, district and state-wide policies that are relevant to each participant; and (3) participant copies of professional development materials, guidance curriculum, and other personal school counseling artifacts addressing LGBT issues in schools. Results obtained from both the interviews and the document review are presented simultaneously and divided into six overarching thematic categories which will make up the sections of this chapter: (1) student advocacy, (2), education as advocacy, (3) systems advocacy, (4) social/political advocacy, (5) advocacy as purpose-driven, and (6) support (See Appendix H). The first section, “student advocacy”, refers to advocacy for and with students and includes sub-themes on providing individual support, encouraging self-advocacy, advising an LGBT-friendly group or club, and connection to resources. “Education as advocacy” makes up section two and includes educating students, educating school personnel, educating at the macro level and educating self. Next, “systems advocacy” comprises sub-themes on navigating structural barriers, using data to motivate change, and establishing safety. The fourth section, entitled “social/political advocacy”, refers to the advocacy at the community level and consists of community collaboration and legislative activism. With its sub-themes on essence of being, motivation, confronting adversity, and the desire to do more, “advocacy as purpose-driven” makes up section number five. The final section of this chapter is for the thematic category of

“support” and includes sub-themes on faculty and district-level support and LGBT-inclusive student policies.

While five of the thematic categories are consistent with existing literature, the fifth—advocacy as purpose-driven—emerged as a unique category within the data, the details of which will be more thoroughly discussed later. These categories were not intended to represent the experiences of all high school counselor advocates, solely those included in this study. The thematic categories identified in this study differ slightly from those that emerged in the pilot study. Specifically, while the role of “support” was addressed in the discussion section of the pilot study, it was included as a thematic category in this study and included responses to the added interview protocol question related to the impact of LGBT-inclusive student-related policies on participants’ capacity to advocate. Further, “student empowerment” was changed to “student advocacy” to better capture advocacy both with and on behalf of LGBT students; “school climate change” became “systems advocacy” to more appropriately reflect the data in this study; and “personal commitment” was changed to “advocacy as purpose-driven” because the latter title more effectively described the essence of the thematic category.

To ensure clarity of the categories and themes within the context of this study, operational definitions are included in this section when results for a category or theme are introduced. The six thematic categories and their respective subcategories will be described in detail and supported by direct quotes from participants and the conceptual framework, when appropriate. In order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the findings, participants’ experiences and the environments in which they worked, a detailed profile for each participant and their respective school is included below.

### **A. Participant and Site Profiles**

**i. Keith**

Keith is a White, openly gay male high school counselor in his fifties who works in an urban setting and has a caseload of approximately 300 students. The school at which he is employed serves a population of 920 students. At the time of the study, the racial/ethnic student composition of Keith's school was as follows: 51% White, 41% Black, 2% Hispanic, 1% Asian, and 4% Multiracial. In addition, 26% of students received free and reduced lunch. Keith's school is located in a district that has an anti-bullying and harassment policy which protects students on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. He is the co-sponsor of his school's GSA and facilitates a small counseling group for LGBT and questioning students. In addition to engaging in school-level advocacy for and with LGBT students, Keith is actively involved with several LGBT youth-related groups and professional organizations. He has a Ph.D. and has been employed as a school counselor for 21 years.

**ii. Barry**

Barry has seven years of experience as a school counselor and holds a Ph.D. He identifies as White and heterosexual and is 47 years of age. He currently works in a suburban high school composed of about 3,400 students and has close to 500 students on his caseload. At the time of the study, 22% of the student body received free and reduced lunch. Approximately 54% of students were White, 18% identified as Black, 10% were Hispanic, 14% were Asian and 5% were Multiracial. Barry's school district has a policy which explicitly prohibits bullying on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. While not directly involved with his school's GSA, he occasionally assists with projects and events. Additionally, Barry oversees the school's peer mediation program.

**iii. Amanda**

Amanda is a 40-year-old female school counselor who identifies as heterosexual and has 11 years of experience in the school counseling profession. She works in a rural school and has a caseload of 700 students. Of the more than 1400 students enrolled at her school at the time of the study, 82% were White, 11% were Black, 4% were Hispanic, 1% were Asian, and 2% identified as Multiracial. Sexual orientation and gender identity and expression are not included as protected categories in her school district's anti-bullying and harassment policy. Although Amanda helped establish her school's GSA and served as co-sponsor, structural barriers made sustaining the club difficult and it is therefore no longer active.

#### **iv. Tasha**

Tasha is 31 years old and was entering her third year as a high school counselor at the time of the interview; she has about 585 students on her caseload. Tasha is White, female and identifies as heterosexual. She works at a suburban high school in a school district devoid of an LGBT-inclusive anti-bullying policy. Her school serves over 2100 students, the majority of whom are White. Specifically, 78% of students at the time of study were White, 7% were Black, 10% were Hispanic, 1% Asian, and 3% Multiracial. The percentage of students on free and reduced lunch was 22% when the study was conducted. Tasha was the co-sponsor of her school's GSA and helped establish a school-wide anti-bullying committee that addressed, among other things, issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.

#### **v. Stewart**

Stewart is a 42-year-old, White openly gay male employed at an urban high school in a district that has an LGBT-inclusive anti-bullying and harassment policy. In addition to attending to the 300 students on his caseload, Stewart serves as department chair within the school counseling department. The student body at his school is diverse, both in its racial and ethnic makeup as

well as in its socioeconomic composition. At the time of the study, approximately 44% of students were White, 21% were Black, 14% were of Hispanic descent, 14% identified as Asian, 6% were Multiracial and .3% were American Indian. Additionally, 19% of students qualified for free and reduced lunch. While not currently the co-sponsor for his school's GSA, Stewart assumed that role in previous years and continues to be actively involved. He has three years of experience as a school counselor.

**vi. Vicky**

Vicky was the only participant of color in the study. She is a 57-year-old woman of color who openly identifies as a lesbian and is employed at an urban high school. Her district has an LGBT-inclusive anti-bullying policy and an established network of educators trained to serve as LGBT student liaisons at every middle and high school within the district. In addition to being the special education counselor, Vicky serves as the homeless and LGBT student liaison. With 27 years of experience as a school counselor, she has actively co-sponsored the GSA for nine years and organizes a small counseling group for LGBT students. Further, Vicky regularly collaborates with the district on LGBT-related initiatives aimed at benefitting students. Of the 2800 students enrolled during the time of the study, the vast majority, 94%, identified as Hispanic; two percent were White, 3% were Black non-Hispanic, and 1% were of Asian descent. Additionally, 86% of students were on free and reduced lunch.

**vii. Sara**

Sara is a 44-year-old White heterosexual female with 17 years of experience as a school counselor. She works at a suburban high school in a district with an LGBT-inclusive policy which protects LGBT students from bullying and harassment. She is actively involved as a co-sponsor to her school's GSA and has engaged in student-led collaborative community initiatives

with members of the GSA. Her school served nearly 1700 students at the time of the study. More than half of the students, 59%, were on free and reduced lunch. With regard to racial and ethnic composition, at the time of the study 51% of students identified as White, 36% were White, 8% Hispanic, 2% Asian, 3% Multiracial, and .2% American Indian.

#### **viii. Brad**

Brad is a White, gay male in his forties with 18 years of experience as a school counselor; he has about 340 students on his caseload. Brad is employed at a rural high school situated in the only rural school district in the state with explicit protections for students on the basis on sexual orientation; gender identity and expression are not included in the policy. The majority of the more than 1700 students enrolled at the time of the study were low income and of color.

Specifically, 69% of students qualified for free and reduced lunch. Approximately 21% of students identified as White, 70% were Black, 3% were Hispanic, 2% were of Asian descent, 3% were Multiracial and .3% identified as American Indian. In addition to being a high school counselor, Brad also works as a school counselor educator at a local college and previously held national office for a school counseling organization. He frequently speaks about LGBT student-related issues at the local, state and national level. His school does not have a GSA.

#### **ix. Daniel**

Daniel is a White, 38-year-old openly gay male with seven years of experience as a school counselor. He works at a suburban high school which serves close to 2900 students and his district is one with an inclusive anti-LGBT bullying and harassment policy. At the time of the study, the student body of his school was composed of 52% White students, 15% Black students, 10% Hispanic students, 18% Asian students, 4% Multiracial, and .3% American Indian. Sixteen percent of students qualified for free and reduced lunch. In addition to serving as co-sponsor to

his school's GSA, Daniel regularly facilitates educational workshops related to LGBT student-related issues for educators at the district and state level. He also maintains a blog aimed at school counseling professionals and includes strategies for effective advocacy for and with LGBT students.

**x. Bonnie**

Bonnie is a White, heterosexual female in her forties with seven years of experience as a school counselor and works in a suburban setting. Her district includes protections for LGBT students in its anti-bullying and harassment policy; however, Bonnie was unaware that such a policy existed at the time of the interview. She also did not know that her school had a GSA. Aside from an isolated incident working with a transgender student, her interactions and advocacy efforts with LGBT students were minimal. In addition to managing her caseload of approximately 250 students, she led a school-wide anti-bullying campaign. Of the nearly 2500 students enrolled during the time of the study, the ethnic and racial composition was as follows: 43% White, 10% Black, 19% Hispanic, 24% Asian, 4% Multiracial, and .4% American Indian. Socioeconomically, 22% percent of students were on free and reduced lunch.

**xi. Melissa**

Melissa identifies as a White, heterosexual female and is 56 years old. She has 26 years of experience as a school counselor and works at an urban high school with a caseload of about 500 students. Employed in the same district as Vicky, LGBT students in her school are also protected according to the district's policies on bullying and nondiscrimination. Additionally, Melissa serves as the LGBT student liaison within her school and is actively involved with a local LGBT organization committed to cultivating safe and affirming schools for all students. She also co-sponsors the GSA and organizes weekly counseling groups for LGBT and questioning students.



The majority of the student body at Melissa's school are low-income students of color. Specifically, 46% of students qualified for free and reduced lunch at the time of the study. With regard to racial and ethnic demographics, 23% were White, 40% were Black, 36% were Hispanic, 2% were Asian, and .3% were American Indian.

## **xii. Jessica**

Jessica is a White, heterosexual female in her thirties and is employed at a predominately White, middle and upper-middle class suburban high school. She is responsible for a caseload of approximately 400 students and has 7 years of experience as a school counselor. Jessica's school is situated in a district without an LGBT-inclusive anti-bullying policy and with a deep legacy of racial and class divisions. Of the over 1900 students enrolled during the study, 82% were White, 2% were Black, 5% were Hispanic, 8% were Asian, 2% were Multiracial, and .3% were American Indian. Only 5% of the student body qualified for free and reduced lunch. At the time of our interview, Jessica had recently helped students establish the school's first GSA and was serving as the club's co-sponsor.

## **B. Student Advocacy**

Included as one of the three levels in the ACA Advocacy Competencies, student advocacy is central to social justice education's ongoing aim to encourage marginalized populations—including LGBT students across identity groups—to understand their personal experiences within an unequal social system (Love, 2000). Consistent with that framework, student advocacy—as defined in this study—involved helping students identify social and institutional barriers that impede their well-being and assisting them in developing self-advocacy skills (Lewis, et al. 2002). Participants engaged in advocacy both with and on behalf of LGBT students across identity groups (Lewis, et al., 2002). Melissa underscored the importance of

advocacy for and with students by stating, “My students have diverse needs and it’s my role to...understand what they are and then clarify for the student what is their role and then once you do that, you then know when your role as advocate begins.” She then added,

The reason I became a counselor is to empower; that was my focus....You have to learn early on if you’re going to be a good counselor that savior has nothing to do with you.

We’re not saving anybody. We’re developing; we’re empowering; we’re guiding to resources...and where there’s danger, we’re intervening to protect.

Participants in this study took action to facilitate positive growth among LGBT students by providing individual support, encouraging self-advocacy, advising an LGBT-friendly group or club and providing access to resources.

#### **i. Providing Individual Support**

Although participants in this study displayed varying degrees of advocacy, they all demonstrated the same unwavering commitment to support individual students. Most participants talked about providing emotional guidance to students who are in the process of coming out to their parents and school community. For example, Amanda emphasized the need to listen and shared a recent example: “Last year we had a student who identified as gay...acceptance was a big deal, especially with his dad. His mom pretty much knew but coming out to his dad was a lot harder.”

Similarly, Tasha revealed that many LGBT and questioning students sought her support about whether and how to come out to parents. She shared the following exchange with a gay African American student who asked, “‘Should I tell my parents?’ And my question to him was, ‘Is it safe to tell them?’ And he was like, ‘Well I don't know. That's why I'm here.’” She also noted that this student’s parents were “particularly religious and went to church every Sunday

and...so that was actually my student's biggest issue: 'My parents are going to think I'm going to hell.'"

In fact, most of the participants disclosed that many LGBT students sought their support after having experienced religious intolerance at the hands of a friend, parent or faculty member. Brad, one of the two participants employed at a rural school, quoted some of his students who have made comments such as, "My friend says I'm going to Hell" and "My pastor says I'm going to Hell because the Bible says I'm going to Hell." Brad mentioned that such students seek his guidance for navigating these situations. Melissa opened up about a lesbian student who came to her after sitting through a teacher-led discussion about "whether homosexuality was...inborn or chosen." According to Melissa, the student had to listen to her peers say, "It's an abomination...they're going to go to Hell' and, you know 'God hates them'...and this kid just like shrunk...and said 'Everything I understood about my school and my friends has just been thrown out the window by a teacher.'" Additionally, Melissa recounted supporting a student whose mother has disowned her for religious reasons:

I've also had years ago a girl who was sleeping in...her friend's car because her mother was a very church-oriented person...and would say, 'You can only be in your house or church and you are not going to be a lesbian. That's it; you're not going to be.' And the kid said, 'But well I am and I can't not be.' So Mom said, 'Get out.' And that kid couch surfed and then ran out of couches and then slept in her girlfriend's car for all of senior year.

Melissa's support yielded positive results. She disclosed, "We supported her here as much as we could but the bottom line is she graduated. She finished high school under those circumstances and eventually reconciled with her mother."

Some of the participants also talked about often being the only school counselor who possessed the competency to effectively support LGBT students. As Barry expressed,

Some counselors do not have the same bent and orientation sensitivity to the kids...who come in with those concerns....As a result that usually means that I'm the one that's going to help them deal with it and I've been the only male counselor the last two schools for a while so when we had a young man who was dealing with his own issues of homosexuality or bisexuality, they would send him to me and I'm happy to do that but it is discouraging to think who's going to take care of that person.

Similarly, Keith described a situation at a previous school in which another school counselor referred a gay student to him. Keith explained,

The thing that shocked me the most is we as counselors dealt with suicide, abuse, cutting issues, drug issues, death, grief, loss, pregnancy and this other counselor dealt with all those things but when it came to dealing with a gay student he felt he didn't know what to do and he ran out and got someone else to talk.

Students of color and those who were lower-income often faced additional challenges. In reference to LGBT students of color and those who are lower income, Barry said, "It can be a double whammy. Not only do they have to deal with their race or the color of their skin or where mom or dad was born but just their own personal struggle." Correspondingly, Melissa mentioned that her, "...kids of color have a harder time in their homes and their communities and their places of faith in terms of acceptance. I can tell you that this is the population that most often feels they have to be closeted." Vicky—who also served as the liaison to homeless students and families—revealed that for LGBT students who are lower-income and sometimes homeless, "You worry first about eating and then about sexuality." She added, "Poor kids...they don't

come out of the closet that easily because their peers are not very sympathetic so if they find me or there's a teacher that directs them to me and start working with them things get better."

Participants also spoke about taking special considerations to support transgender students who were in the process of transitioning. Bonnie focused on ensuring academic success for one of her students. Eager to ease the process of transitioning, she asked the student, "How can I help you and what are we going to do to make this a successful senior year for you?"

Similarly, Daniel shared a specific incident involving a transgender student:

The student himself...was conflicted and I think had been exploring and trying to figure it out and...so began changing the appearance and changing the name so a lot of our conversations were about, again, "So you want to change your name. You want people to start referring to you as this gender. Let's talk about what that looks like and what all the possible consequences would be..." Ultimately the student made a full transition and I think felt supported in that.

Melissa continued to support students long after graduation through annual reunions with GSA members in which they, "sit in a huge group...and we do this joint circle where we just kind of connect on that level and then I just create these opportunities for these exchanges between them."

## **ii. Encouraging Self-Advocacy**

According to the ACA Advocacy Competencies, one of the objectives of counselor advocacy is to foster students' sense of their own personal power (Lewis, et al., 2002). Such an aim is also consistent with social justice education which seeks to empower marginalized students to take individual and collective action against the systems of domination that sustain their subordinate status in the classroom (Love, 2000). Additionally, school counselors are

encouraged to work with—not solely on behalf of—students so that they can feel comfortable and knowledgeable enough to advocate for themselves. For instance, Barry described advocacy as, “Helping them to find a voice and then come alongside them to maybe help be their voice initially but then help them find their own.”

Participants disclosed instances in which they assisted students with developing strategies to navigate barriers and overcome adversity. In particular, Keith talked about urging self-advocacy among LGBT students who had been targets of bullying and harassment, asking “How can I help empower the student to give voice to that, to say, ‘You know what? This is who I am. You can’t treat me that way.’” Describing an experience with a transgender student who was transitioning, Tasha said, “We worked on communication strategies and, you know, different things that he could do if other students did say something or if he felt uncomfortable.” Bonnie shared a comparable example with a transgender student:

I said, ‘How are we going to tell your teachers and how are you going to tell your peers and...who are you going to talk to if things aren’t going well for you whether you’re in a threatened environment or if you’re just having anxiety?’

In similar fashion, Melissa spoke about the importance of teaching self-love and affirmation and added, “I teach them about filling their own love tank...and once they get that, then they start to bloom; they just start to bloom.” She also said that students often “...find the creating of their own families in essence; they find a lot of support in school...And it’s really a testament to the power of support, to the power of groups, to the power of advocacy—self and other.” In particular, she shared an example of self-advocacy as demonstrated by one of her students during the school’s club fair:

A parent came over and he approached one of the officers of the GSA and asked, “What is this?” and they explained and he said, “That’s allowed?” And actually, my GSA president said, “Well actually, to forbid it would be against the law.”

Jessica spoke about a related experience involving a transgender student who was able to cultivate self-advocacy skills through his involvement with the school’s GSA: “Throughout the year, being able to rely on other students and realize everybody in that group was 100% accepting...I think really boosted his self-confidence and allowed him to... realize, “‘I deserve this’”.

Daniel talked about the importance of self-advocacy as a means, “...to help them navigate this issue for themselves so that it becomes a piece of who they are...and so then they’re able to also take care of the rest of their life and be successful.” He went on to describe the process toward self-advocacy in detail:

They’d be self-loathing and you’d be dealing with that for a while and you’re giving them some education; you’re normalizing and things like that and telling them, you know, the first person people come out to is themselves and then as you see them continue to become stronger within themselves then see the student start to feel more comfortable and then sometimes they’ll get to a point where they say, ‘You know what, I think I’m ready to talk to my parents.’

Encouraging self-advocacy often meant urging students to connect with school organizations, including LGBT-friendly clubs. As Jessica told a lesbian student who had recently moved to the area from another state:

I told her we do live in an area that isn’t as open and accepting as I would like it to be and I think she got that pretty quickly...I encouraged her to join clubs and organizations...or

to find that small group of people that she could become friends with and slowly start to be herself. And she did; she really did.

### **iii. Advising an LGBT-friendly Club or Group**

School counselors are well positioned to sponsor or advise LGBT-friendly school-based clubs such as GSAs (Gonzalez & McNulty, 2011). All of the participants, with the exception of Bonnie and Brad, had experience sponsoring, co-sponsoring or being involved in a GSA at their school. Only two participants—Amanda and Brad, both from rural settings—worked at schools without an active GSA or LGBT-friendly club. Three of the participants—Keith, Melissa, and Vicky—facilitated or helped organize counseling small groups for LGBT students and those who were questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity in addition to actively co-sponsoring a GSA club.

Because GSAs are meant to be student-initiated and student-led (Griffin & Ouellett, 2002), participants' adopted more of an advisory role. As Vicky explained, "This is their club and this is what they need to do....I shouldn't be telling them what to do, when to do it, how to do it. I provide information." Working in an area she described as "extremely conservative", Jessica underscored the importance of allowing students to lead and assessing their comfort level prior to engaging in school-wide GSA activities:

When we first started, there was some real concern amongst students that they wouldn't be well-received. We didn't publicize the meetings; they chose not to. I kind of let them run with it and let them -- as comfortable as you guys are, you guys tell me when you're ready to broaden it.

From providing support and a space to socialize to engaging in advocacy, the clubs—and participants' roles—served different functions depending on the needs of the students. As Vicky



mentioned, “It depends on the group; it depends on the year.” Daniel stated, “The kids really called the shots so sometimes it was let’s sit and talk, ‘What’s going on? How do you feel’ ...and then, ‘Is there any advocacy work that you would like to do?’” He also added, “Sometimes it was things about specifically being gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and sometimes it was normal adolescence human development stuff where they just needed to process this about a class.” According to a document related to Melissa’s GSA’s “Constitution”, the mission of the club was “to create a welcoming environment for all by representing the needs and concerns of sexual minorities through awareness programs, advocacy, support, service projects, and educational resources.”

Analogous to the GSAs, participants who facilitated small group counseling sessions also allowed students to set the agenda. As Keith explained, “My experience has been the issue we discuss is quite often not identifying as LGBTQ. It could be dealing with cutting behaviors, my family, anxiety...but it's also embedded within my identity and I can talk about that too.” A review of Keith’s group counseling curriculum provided an overall outline of the group’s process. For example, group members completed an interest questionnaire to determine the range of areas on which to focus. In addition to keeping meetings open-ended, weekly topics included sharing personal stories, internalized homophobia, careers, relationships and advocacy. According to a document provided by Melissa, she facilitated two to three groups per year, each of which consisted of 8-12 students. Involvement in the group allowed students the opportunity to attend various activities including a “Student Empowerment Field Trip.”

While participants acknowledged the importance of serving as an advisor to students, they were equally active in fostering leadership and empowerment among club members. Melissa, Vicky, Keith and Sara talked about providing club members with opportunities to attend

conferences and seminars outside of the school in order to, as Sara explained, "...develop their leadership skills, build stronger GSAs, to teach them how to advocate on their own behalf, to build those alliances with the straight community." Melissa also talked about working with club members to raise awareness and motivate change: "A GSA is great but if you only function within the super safe space, you know, you're not pushing the boundaries any so we've taken on some boundary pushing and we've done it very consciously and carefully." She recalled one experience in particular that took place at a college fair:

We created a little piece of paper attached to a safe space sticker and we made a pitch to all the college reps...and we included it in their packet and we basically said if you feel that your college is LGBTQ-supportive, not just friendly...please take this and display it at your table.

All the participants who were part of their school's GSA club talked about their involvement in various awareness campaigns and Days of Action—such as National Coming Out Day, Day of Silence, and Ally Week—meant to create consciousness about LGBT issues. Melissa stated, "We do a massive amount of work, predominately designed to be awareness raising...Our GSA believes, that if people have information, they make different choices. And when they're ill-informed or under-informed or skewed in their perceptions, that's where the hurtful behavior comes in." She was also involved in a district-wide effort to train GSA members as speakers and safe school advocates. As she described, "My role is to train the youth; they tell their stories and I support them in that process."

Within their role as advisor to the GSA, participants' mostly engaged in advocacy with students, rather than for them. On certain occasions, however, participants intervened to advocate on students' behalf. As Jessica explained, "When an issue became greater than a group of kids

could deal with, they brought it to us and we helped when we could.” She shared a specific example involving a transgender student:

They brought concerns to us a lot, one of them being our transgender student. One of the things that she was experiencing was difficulty with bathrooms so the group brought that to our attention. And as the advisors and the liaison with administration, that was something that we brought up. It didn’t get solved last year; it got solved this year.

All participants involved in GSAs, with the exception of Stewart, incorporated issues related to gender identity and expression into GSA meetings. Participants assisted students in matters related to transitioning and allyship with transgender people and supported student-led campaigns such as the Transgender Day of Remembrance. Keith stated that, “A number of our students who participate in the GSA are transgender or genderqueer and/or are dating transgender students so they have become in their own right very progressive and thoughtful about how to make sure we're representing all the students.”

According to participants, GSA clubs and counseling groups for LGBT students generally reflected the racial, ethnic and socioeconomic class demographics of the school. However, Daniel, Sara and Tasha expressed that their school’s club consisted of very few students of color. For example, Sara admitted, “Now the population of school being approximately 30% Black, the GSA group was not representative of those demographics. The GSA group was all White.” She then recalled there “...was one Black member who came but didn’t actively participate. He was- I know he gathered information from being there...but he didn’t share his own story or his own information” and added, “I think that has to do with the culture and the community.”

Additionally, participants noted that class was never directly discussed and issues of race were seldom brought up during club and group meetings. Of all the participants, only Keith

recalled having specific conversations related to the intersection between race and sexual orientation. He explained, “Some of our Black students have talked about, ‘If I’m a part of this group am I not Black enough? If I’m a part of that group, am I not gay enough?’” He also mentioned the role of religion in conversations with club members who were Black and gay: “A number of my Black students are also involved in Black churches or their parents are and dealing with those cultures have become more of our conversation than what they experience within the school day.”

Participants shared that many students who were of color talked about how religion and cultural beliefs, rather than race, intersected with their sexual orientation. For example, Daniel mentioned that, “Our president one year was an African immigrant and she would talk about the conversations between her and her mother that centered around religion.” Likewise, Jessica spoke about an Asian transgender student who told, “stories in our meetings that not all of his family members have been accepting.” Keith also talked about his efforts to both encourage leadership among students of color and improve GSA outreach initiatives. He shared one particular example involving a campaign for National Coming Out Day:

I went to them and said, you know, ‘We have four White girls sitting behind this table at all the lunches and I know that you all are...so excited to do it but I’m wondering could you talk to x, y or z because I think if asked, they’d also want to participate and maybe people would just see different things.’

Keith also recalled, “Our GSA has talked about...wanting to put up posters and all to make sure that we’re representing a wide range of people and just not certain groups of people.”

Regardless of the function of the GSA, all the participants who were involved with a GSA made clear that their primary and most significant role was to provide a safe space where

LGBT and questioning students could meet. As Stewart explained, “the most important part is offering an opportunity to ...have that safe space and everything else is just a bonus. So if Day of Silence gets up and off the ground, that’s great. If not that’s okay too.”

#### **iv. Connection to Resources**

Participants provided LGBT students with a variety of LGBT-related resources to assist with questions, make referrals and, when possible, connect students with local LGBT-friendly organizations. Making the necessary referrals and connecting students to resources was particularly useful when students’ needs went beyond the scope of what the school could offer. As Melissa recalled,

I have plenty of kids who as LGBT kids come to me having cut themselves, having engaged in other dangerous behaviors, you know, substance abuse and all that stuff. When they’re feeling whole, they don’t do those things. And we’re not therapists; we can’t make them whole but we certainly can lead them to the resources that they need.

Connecting students to resources was also useful for participants who hoped to support students in the establishment of a GSA or LGBT-friendly club or group, as was the case with Sara:

Several years ago, working in an out-of-state school, I had a couple students come to me and disclose that they referred to themselves as gay and lesbian and that they wanted some kind of support group but weren’t sure whether or not it was safe for them to come out in public and so we connected with GLSEN and got a lot of materials.

Even if students did not need or ask for additional information, participants made certain to have resources at their disposal. Brad explained, “I do have a referral list. I...have other resources and hotlines...to get information and I have printed materials from the Human Rights Campaign and Lambda Legal.” Tasha also mentioned having, “...a lot of materials from GLSEN and just

different handouts and posters and that kind of stuff that we would hand out.” Vicky shared with me a comprehensive list of LGBT resources and local, state, and national organizations for inquiring students and parents. The list—along with the phone number to a helpline for LGBT youth—is available in her office as well as on the school district’s website and includes information in English and Spanish.

Daniel provided prospective college students with information regarding LGBT-friendly universities. He explained a common scenario:

For a kid who’s nervous about going off to college, I would be like, ‘Well there’s college resources. Let’s look at all the options that this particular institution has in terms of gay-friendly organizations and even gay-friendly housing, gay-supportive environments.’

In a similar fashion, Keith made certain to make diversity-related college and university resources available to students and parents: “When I’m talking to all the parents and students for the big college search info night...I will include...whether it’s a historically black college or how gay and lesbian friendly they are -- these things should be important.”

Keith and Amanda talked about connecting religious students—particularly those who had been struggling with their faith—to LGBT-friendly places of worship. Even though she didn’t “talk much about religion,” Amanda expressed that she will tell students that “there are churches that are very welcoming just so they’ll know that.” Similarly, Keith assuaged the concerns of students who were struggling to reconcile their sexual orientation with their religious beliefs by connecting them to open and affirming places of worship:

Some students who are Christian will come to me and say, you know, ‘I’m gay but I’m also Christian. That means I’m going to Hell, right?’ And I say, ‘Well you do know there are a lot of gay-friendly churches around? You know, there are places you can go and

people you can talk to' and just providing that resource for them. I was talking to a Jewish student and, you know, we have a very gay-friendly synagogue and just saying, 'Here's this person that you can talk to. I think this rabbi will be a connection for you.'

### **C. Education as Advocacy**

Education as advocacy describes education as a tool for creating awareness about LGBT people or issues. Participants demonstrated this form of advocacy by educating students about LGBT issues, educating school personnel, educating at the macro level and/or educating themselves through various professional development opportunities to enhance their own knowledge of and competence with LGBT youth. Participants talked at length about the role of education in their advocacy efforts. Vicky even said, "I think the most important role of advocacy is education."

#### **i. Educating Students**

Participants educated students to both proactively raise awareness about LGBT issues through programming and curriculum and to reactively respond to insensitive or disparaging remarks related to sexual orientation or gender identity and expression. In particular, participants talked about intervening when they heard words like "fag" and phrases such as "that's so gay." For example, Bonnie told students, "...we have a no tolerance rule here, you know, we don't tolerate it. I don't care if you're joking; we just don't do it." Likewise, Melissa said, "I think you still hear a lot of people calling each other gay or fag or whatever and if I ever hear it I say 'you need to choose another word.'" Brad sometimes often spoke more in-depth with perpetrators of anti-bullying and explained,

There's been a couple others of students that didn't see the other point of view and you'd call them in and I'd say, 'Look you have your own belief but we respect- you know you

don't have to agree with them; they don't have to agree with you but you respect each other.' You know I've had a couple of those situations where I talk to students and students learn to respect. Again, they don't agree but they learn to respect, you know, the different points of view.

Additionally, Melissa demonstrated the importance of education, noting "I have a lot of faith in kids. If you know how to talk to kids, they will seriously consider what you are saying." In particular, she shared a positive exchange with an African American student who had used the word "faggot inappropriately":

I called him in and we sat down and had our conversation...and I always explain to them at the end that this was our opportunity to learn, that I hope they're able to take advantage of that because it is against school rules and that if it's heard again, we will take disciplinary action...He said, 'I understand; I understand'...and he gets up, turns around and goes, 'Can I give you a hug?' My heart stopped and I see this a lot which is why education is so important.

Many of the participants also talked about collaborating with students to proactively educate the student body about LGBT issues. Educational campaigns such as World AIDS Day, Day of Silence and Transgender Day of Remembrance were common ways participants collaborated with students. For example, Melissa said, "We do World AIDS Day for the purpose of teaching." Tasha worked with 40 student leaders to develop an anti-bullying curriculum for ninth grade students inclusive of issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. As she explained, the students went through hours of in-depth training to teach the lessons themselves:



Every lesson, they had different examples and it was, 'Is this bullying? Why or why not? What could you do? What could they have done differently'...and I actually used several specific examples that went directly with LGBT bullying, everything from use of like, 'That's so gay' ...to, 'Joe got beat up in the parking lot because they saw him holding hands with his boyfriend'...and then just having those discussions about what that means and so it actually opened up a lot of really great discussions. My student leaders and the homeroom teachers all came back to me and said how surprised they were at how open the ninth graders were to have those kinds of discussions, even as they related to, you know, LGBT issues.

Tasha also described a situation in which she facilitated a lesson related to anti-LGBT bullying in response to a student “who was being teased and being called ‘gay’ and...’fag’ and all kinds of negative slurs.” She explained, “I came in and had a discussion with that health class and...what I did was sort of a condensed version of my anti-bullying [lesson] and then I made sure to pull in the, you know, LGBT.” Vicky also talked about facilitating a targeted anti-bullying lesson in response to anti-LGBT epithets. Vicky, who worked at a school with a predominately Latino/a population, explained that “...we were having more issues with new arrivals from different places...you know with all the slurs and the *maricon* and we’ve had issues with that and- especially when they get together in their little group.” As she recalled,

I got with the ESOL department and said, ‘We need all your kids. We need to do a bullying workshop because we’re having issues.’ And she said, ‘Oh yes I know; you’re right. Let’s do it.’.... and we almost fell off our chairs from the stuff we heard in there and the bigotry...it was intense.

Many participants discussed integrating issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression into classroom guidance lessons related to diversity. Keith talked about “...infusing in natural conversations LGBTQ students when we talk about relationships, bullying dating, all these things, all these other issues that we go and do classroom guidance lessons with the whole school, making sure that LGBTQ students are represented.” Likewise, Amanda shared a variety of classroom guidance lessons based on diversity and examining prejudice and stereotypes and explained,

We’ve made a concerted effort over the past years to specifically include LGBT students.

When we have done these presentations with students on bullying and harassment, we do talk about that and we include video snippets about students who are lesbian and gay and the struggles that they have sometimes with depression and suicidal ideation.

For one lesson in particular, students were asked to do a word association based on a list of fifteen words such as “Hispanic, poor, disability and gay.” The instructions stated, “You will read a word, then students must write the first thing that comes to mind (word or image) in relation to that word... As a class, read through each word individually and discuss student responses.” Another lesson shared by Amanda entitled “Embrace Diversity” explored various manifestations of privilege and oppression in society such as heterosexism. For a part of the lesson called “Privilege Walk”, students were required to “stand in a line, shoulder to shoulder, facing the same direction” while the counselor read off several statements including one related to sexual orientation. According to the instructions, “if a statement applies to them, students are to take a step.” While Amanda was prepared to implement the lesson on embracing diversity “it ended up getting pulled....Some of the faculty members didn't feel comfortable doing

it...nobody ever said explicitly—but it seems to be regarding the issue of, it addressed LGBT issues as well.”

Gender identity was not included in Amanda’s lesson plans for students. In contrast, Keith explained, “We have tried to infuse it in our bullying lessons, in our school climate lessons and in our conversations in general about college choice.” And while Tasha integrated matters of gender identity and expression into her anti-bullying curriculum for students, she admitted that it “was a difficult concept for them to understand; they really didn't get the gender issue and so you really had to kind of define, you know gender versus sex and then have that discussion.”

## **ii. Educating School Personnel**

Participants emphasized the importance of ensuring that teachers and administrators addressed issues related to social justice in general and sexual orientation and gender identity and expression in particular with sensitivity and understanding. Vicky expressed the need to educate, “the faculty, the school community as a whole, you know, from the custodian all the way to the principal.” She also noted, “It’s ideal for an advocate to be a counselor because you’re in a position to reach teachers...in the capacity an expert.” Many of the participants engaged in proactive efforts to educate school personnel. For instance, Keith said that he, “got materials on supporting LGBTQ students and...gave a copy of it to just the administrators and the school counselors in the school.” In comparable fashion, Vicky mentioned that, “I do a lot of emails....I send them information. I try to send them stuff from the American Psychological Association. I have fliers; I print things for them and put it in their mailbox.” She also said, “I’ve become available to them if you have questions, if you have a difficult situation with a student, if there’s something you don’t understand...and they know they can come to me for anything related to the LGBT topics.”

Stewart connected to faculty members and raised awareness about LGBT issues by “getting the faculty to participate in placing safe space cards in their classrooms” and added that “the awareness of it is something that, I think, just keeps people in tune with thinking about okay, it’s something I should be thinking about.” Although educating school personnel generally occurred for rather than on behalf of students, some participants collaborated with students on school-wide educational campaigns aimed at raising consciousness among students and faculty members. In particular, Melissa talked about working with twelve students to create a socio-drama in which students “do these little dramatic presentations and there’s a series of them and we start with homophobia and we move through affirmation and validation and celebration. And we use it to teach.” Noting the performance’s profound impact on school personnel, Melissa said,

Many people cry when they watch this....One faculty member approached another faculty member and she says, ‘You know, I didn’t used to like them.’ And the other faculty member says, ‘Who?’ And she says, ‘The gays.’ And the other faculty member said, ‘Oh.’ Then she said, ‘But now, I see it completely different.’ That’s what she said and she approached me and said, ‘If you ever need help with any of your events, let me know’ and ‘what you do is wonderful’ she tells me. So just like that, just by watching this.

Describing her involvement, Melissa noted, “The students are the ones doing the teaching.... It’s one thing for an adult to be squawking about how things have to change but when the kids are asking for it, it’s incredible.”

Daniel, Vicky, Melissa, Keith, Tasha and Brad facilitated trainings for the entire faculty on LGBT-related issues. Brad shared, “When we present it to the school...we don’t do a separate

training for LGBTQ. It's more included in the diversity of the protection of all students."

Regardless of how participants framed the trainings to faculty members, everyone agreed on their importance in creating a safer school climate. Regarding the broad-based impact of faculty trainings, Tasha explained:

I think there are 130 faculty members at my previous school so if you wait until you can have a one-on-one discussion with everyone -- that may never happen. So being able to have open discussions with faculty and being able to do, you know, Safe Zone training and sort of get your adults in the building on board -- if the adults in the building are on board then the kids follow.

Despite their efforts, however, some participants had more difficulty getting faculty members "on board." After learning that a transgender student withdrew from school after repeatedly being referred to by his legal name in the lunch line, Sara, "proposed these concerns, shared these concerns with administration but didn't receive approval to do sensitivity training, for instance, with the cafeteria staff. I didn't receive approval to openly provide sensitivity training to teachers."

Of all the issues related to LGBT students, participants expressed that school personnel had the least competence with regard to gender identity and expression. As Vicky said, "Transgender is the hardest because they [faculty members] don't understand." Daniel expressed similar sentiments:

It's harder.... They don't know the best practices...and that goes for bathrooms; that goes for discipline and dress code because it really, within schools this is not something that people have experienced much in their lives and so they don't know what to do with it.

In order to proactively raise awareness about challenges faced by transgender students, Vicky sent new teachers, “something about transgender and I sent them a video I got from GLSEN that was really good and I said since we have a few transgender students...and then I talked a little bit about transgender.” Correspondingly, Keith “connected with the principal and said...we have a couple transgender students...I can type up one page and send it out to the faculty just to let them know how they can be supportive of a transgender student.”

Participants noted that fostering awareness about transgender issues was particularly important when a student was in transition. For instance, Melissa described having to educate teachers of a student who was in the process of transitioning: “I had to build a whole little support around his needs, communicate with the teachers. They did well. The teachers are doing really well; I’m proud of them.” Jessica also shared an exchange she had with a fellow teacher regarding a transgender student’s transition:

I can remember one specific teacher coming to me and saying, ‘Do you know that I have a student coming to me this year that is a “he” but she’s really a girl?’ And I said, ‘Oh, you mean John Doe?’ And he said, ‘Oh you know him, her, him?’ And I said, ‘He’s a “he” and his name is John Doe....I think the best thing you can do is to not call attention to it. He’s a boy...the thing that you need to remember is to be sensitive to the fact that he wants to be called John Doe. That is his name.’ And he just kind of looked at me and said, ‘Alright. I think it’s weird but okay.’

### **iii. Educating at the Macro Level**

Many of the participants in this study took steps to educate parents, community members and education professionals at the district, state and national level. Daniel, Keith, Brad and Melissa spoke specifically about providing professional development beyond the school level.

For example, Melissa conducted presentations for “educators, mental health professionals, and other youth workers.” In addition, Keith described the importance of educating faculty members in surrounding areas:

I do think it's our responsibility as school counselors to affect other school counselors...I'm getting to go speak to a principal and an assistant principal and some counselors in another school on Monday who are, there are students who want to start a GSA and they're concerned about how to do it so they said, you know, ‘Can you meet with us and tell us what's involved in that and help them navigate their own communities but also help their students?’

Likewise, Brad discussed serving as a contact person for school counselors in his district who sought resources or advice for working with LGBT students. He recounted one specific experience in which an elementary school counselor contacted him regarding a “5<sup>th</sup> grader that thinks she is gay.” As he explained, the teacher said, “‘I don’t believe this because of my religion’—they always push their religion out—‘but I want to help the student. What should I do?’” Brad responded by saying,

You let the student know that you support them and you respect the student just like you would anybody else that’s different from what you believe...If you still feel like you can’t help the student then you need to refer the student to someone else that can.

In addition to offering himself as a resource to educators in his district, Brad facilitated “several presentations around the state for our school counselor association as well as different regions for school counselors” as well as “...some presentations [at the National Level] to help educators learn to work with LGBTQ youth.” As someone who had previously held national office with a school counseling association, Brad recalled that “several states would ask me to do that

presentation as a part of their conference so...I would go to their conferences and that would be one of the breakouts.” He claimed to be on the “forefront” in terms of educating at a macro level and added, “It’s become a passion, I reckon.”

Both Keith and Daniel spoke about their experience facilitating professional development trainings and workshops for educators from more rural and conservative school districts. Specifically, Keith shared an instance in which he facilitated a professional development training in a nearby rural town: “These were people who were traditionally not LGBTQ youth supportive and it was just an interesting dialogue... We had...two hours to see how they changed some of their initial opinions.” When interacting with educators from rural school districts Daniel emphasized, “You have to meet them where they’re at and...you have to come from a place of understanding...because some of the questions that they will ask and some of the statements they will make are hard to take.” He shared an exchange with a school counselor from “some bizarrely small school district” who attended his session because “she had an elementary school student whose mom was in a relationship with another woman.” Daniel described the conversation in more detail:

The language she used was, you know, ‘This was Mom’s choice and Mom’s sexual preference’...but versus sitting there and correcting her the whole time, I wanted to support her and give her some information that would help her as she’s trying to help that kid because to me it was a huge thing that she came to that session that either she or her school paid for to try to help that one kid.

Further, Daniel spoke extensively about trainings he developed and implemented in collaboration with a colleague at the local, state and district level. He explained, “We ran five of them last year...and we’re doing two more this week...And I had done a presentation earlier...that was



open to teachers...I did a state presentation on Friday—two of them—and that went well.”

Referring to the objective of the trainings, he states, “I think it’s just getting out there and trying to help at least this system become more supportive of the students and the families that are coming to the schools.”

Documents related to Daniel’s professional development presentations for district employees covered topics such as supporting LGBT students and families in the areas of academics and socio-emotional health. One of his sample presentations provided national and state school climate statistics and risk factors and appropriate terminology. Daniel also included reflective questions, pair-share activities and guidelines for what teachers, administrators and counselors can do to create a more affirming school climate for LGBT students. Attendees were given the opportunity to apply what they learned into action through a variety of hypothetical case scenarios involving LGBT students followed by a series of questions including, “What issues and concerns are present?”, “What would be the challenges?”, “What could a school counselor do in this situation” and “What further resources might you need?” The three sample presentations also included special considerations for working with transgender students and LGBT families as well as additional information on LGBT resources and organizations.

To make information about advocacy for and with LGBT students more accessible to school counselors across the country, Daniel said,

I write a blog which has a lot of LGBT advocacy posts in there, trying to make school counselors aware...I think there is a lot of value in making sure that if there’s no one else in a school educated about this, we are- that we have some ideas about risk factors, standards of practice, about resources to send students and families and teachers to.

#### **iv. Educating Self**

Consistent with their efforts to create awareness among students, school personnel, and the public, all participants sought opportunities to further their own understanding and competence about LGBT students and issues. Tasha and Sara specifically mentioned conferences as a means to increase their professional knowledge. Specifically, Sara recalled attending a conference on “LGBTQ leadership” with several students who expressed an interest in establishing a GSA and noted that in addition to breakout sessions for students, “...there was another component for the adults and acting in terms of being a sponsor or support to some students.” In similar fashion, Tasha mentioned becoming “certified at a statewide school counseling association conference...as a Safe Zone certified trainer” which also gave her “resources, particularly in working with my faculty.”

Melissa and Vicky both talked about attending professional development trainings that were both encouraged and funded by the district. Melissa described the training as “a top-down thing because they literally said, ‘This is an all-call for educators who are interested in learning to support...GLBTQ youth.’ And I was very impressed because...I can’t say for sure but I’m going to say 125 people showed up.” The training connected educators who were interested in learning about and engaging in advocacy with LGBT students. According to Melissa, “...it fueled, it empowered us to do what we did...and we began the work.”

Most participants did not receive district-sponsored professional development. For example, Bonnie admitted, “The County doesn’t do any in-services on this population... so unless you do it on your own, you’re probably not going to get anything.” She then added, “I definitely think that there could be more training for school counselors.” And unlike Vicky and Melissa—for whom LGBT-related education and advocacy was encouraged at the district-level—Jessica, Sara and Amanda spoke explicitly about educating themselves as a means of

responding to opposition at the district and school-level. Fearing backlash after deciding to become the co-sponsor to the school's GSA, Jessica admitted, "I went home and I got piles of research and I was expecting the Board to tell us "no" and I got all the reasons legally why they weren't allowed to do that and was prepared to use it."

Tasha shared that educating herself impacted her education efforts with students because she was able to "share some of that [knowledge] with some of my students who...didn't get it." Tasha recalled one experience in particular involving education related to gender identity and expression:

I actually went to a transgender support group meeting and that was the greatest experience and I'm so glad that I pushed myself to do that because I had always sort of voiced 'yeah I'm an LGBT advocate' but quite frankly I didn't know a lot about the transgender population...I have to say it was a really outside my comfort zone kind of experience.

Keith also "pushed" himself to learn more and to "grow" as an advocate. For him, education involved introspection and an examination of his privileged social identities. Speaking specifically about working with LGBT students of color, Keith said,

There were a lot of things I didn't know I didn't know and that was the biggest eye opener because I'm gay; you're gay. The fact that you're Black and don't have any money, we're no different. And in so many ways we're not....There's so many things we have in common but I still don't have that person's perspective and family and there's so much I don't know so being willing to realize I don't know and to ask ....And to be able to just open up and hear correction.

Emphasizing that there is always room to grow as an advocate, Keith added,

If you're going to be an advocate one of the things you need to learn is 'I'm so sorry; I'm working on that area, thank you for pointing that out to me.' Some things I'm pretty sure I understand and then I don't and I think we need to be willing to grow...and it's okay.

#### **D. Systems Advocacy**

Participants took various steps to cultivate a more positive and supportive culture for LGBT students across identity groups at the school level. Systems advocacy—as defined in this study—included navigating structural barriers, using data to motivate change, and establishing safety. Participants proactively engaged in advocacy at the school (Lewis, et al., 2002) level, both with and on behalf of LGBT students and often in collaboration with others. For instance, Keith worked in collaboration with a transgender student's parents to “navigate the bureaucracy of the school” in order to change the student's name in the computer system, even before his legal name change was made official. Daniel underscored the ethical and professional need to foster a positive environment for LGBT students by asserting, “One of the responsibilities I feel we have in terms of...trying to advocate and it's in our ethical codes. I mean ASCA Ethical Codes talk about this; there's a responsibility to advocate for students on a...systems level.”

##### **i. Navigating Structural Barriers**

In addition to confronting adversity, all participants had to navigate structural barriers in order to advocate for and with LGBT students. Among the barriers mentioned by participants, lack of time and heavy caseloads seemed to be the most significant hindrance to advocacy. In fact, each of the twelve participants' caseloads far exceeded ASCA's 250 student-to-counselor ration recommendation (ASCA, 2005). Having to attend to the needs of so many students impacted participants' capacity to advocate for and with all students. With a caseload of 700 students Amanda admitted, “Because I have so many kids it's very, very hard to get everything

done.” Likewise, Tasha asserted, “I really think that the biggest problem is that it's so overloaded -- the number of students to the number of adults in that building is just, it's really overwhelming” and added, “It's not set up to be successful for proactive efforts.” Tasha eventually left her previous school because, as she explained,

It was beyond unreasonable. I worked an average of sixty to seventy hours a week and I didn't work sixty to seventy hours a week to be able to do my job and do amazing classroom guidance and programming and run small groups- no. I worked sixty to seventy hours a week to get kind of the minimum done so that kids could graduate and so that kids who needed help, that I knew needed help that I could help.

In similar fashion, Vicky and Melissa spoke about working additional hours in order to meet the needs of the LGBT students for whom they advocated. As Vicky described, “You end up working more hours than you should, you know. That’s all. It’s a matter of time; that’s all. If I had more time, I’m sure I could do more.” To manage the demands of her 500 student caseload, Melissa “agreed to continue taking home homework whether that translates to staying late here or bringing home physical work to take home with me.”

Participants also described non-counseling related administrative tasks as taking time away from the social and emotional focus the profession entails. Vicky stated, “Now everything is testing....sexual minority is the last thing in their book but it’s my number one so I’ll get something done.” Likewise, Sarah explained, “The business part of being a school counselor has really taken a turn from a lot of interpersonal communication and is being used for activities that aren’t related to growth and self-exploration.” She also added “Within the last four years it has become increasingly apparent that the college preparedness, work readiness, those sorts of things are taking precedence over assisting students with personal issues.”

Speaking about the impact of structural barriers on her capacity to effectively serve as advocates for and with LGBT students, Sara expressed,

I find that it has further distanced me from actually working with the students on a one-on-one and really my only connection with this population was the after school Gay-Straight Alliance because during the school day, my work and the way that my time was allotted did not include opportunities for a, for instance, a brown bag lunch to sit and discuss or open office hours' time when students could come in and share concerns or talk about themselves and about what their exploring and ask their questions.

Sara further lamented, "I do believe there are a lot of students that I couldn't reach because I simply -- unless they chose to stay after school...that would have been their only connection to receiving that kind of support and advocacy." Additionally, Stewart noted the challenge of engaging in proactive advocacy when time is in short supply: "There's so many other issues we deal with on a daily basis in schools, you know, carving out that time to do it specifically around LGBT issues can be tough."

## **ii. Use of Data**

According to the ACA Advocacy Competencies, counselors should be equipped to utilize data as a means of demonstrating the need for systemic change (Lewis, et al., 2002). Most of the participants in this study provided data—both their own and existing—to create an urgency for school climate change. Daniel described using data "to design a training we ran." Specifically, he said,

We developed a training and when we looked at the county statistics they were alarming as you would expect: higher rates of bullying, higher rates of cyberbullying, higher rates

of substance use....It became very clear that there were like several big bullet points for risk factors.

Additionally, Daniel met with a colleague at the district level who had “been sort of sitting on these scary statistics for several years but nobody had ever done anything with them.” Together, they worked to “develop a fact sheet” for educators on LGBT students. The fact sheet provided information about LGBT students within the district; guidelines to “understand, encourage, learn and act”; a list of local resources; and data related to factors that promote growth and resiliency among LGBT youth.

While almost all the participants talked about sharing data and online research related to LGBT students as a means of creating awareness among their colleagues and therefore motivating systemic change, Tasha, Keith, and, Amanda developed and implemented their own surveys and research to collect data related to school climate, diversity and LGBT students. In particular, Tasha gathered data on an LGBT-inclusive anti-bullying curriculum. After the data were collected, Tasha recalled,

I actually did a presentation for the entire faculty of what the data showed before, why is this important, what are we going to do, why are we doing it, you know, what do we hope is going to happen? And then after I basically did the same thing and I sort of showed them okay 'Look, we did this and now a few months later, here's what we have; here are the differences.'

As a result of her efforts and the evidenced-based findings, Tasha said, “We created an anti-bullying committee and we included parents, community members, counselors, community members, administration, everybody was sort of involved and the PTSA got really on board...and it was really successful.”

Keith focused more specifically on the development of a school climate survey that “all the students answer” as a means of assessing the school climate for LGBT students. A copy of Keith’s annual school climate survey provided students with a list of social identity groups (e.g., Hispanic, Jewish, LGBT) and asked them to circle all the groups with which they identify. In a separate question, students were presented with the same list of social identity groups and instructed to circle, “Some groups or types of people that might not feel accepted in our school.” Also contained in the surveys were entries in which students were presented with a statement and given five options from which to choose, ranging from “frequently” to “never.” Examples included, “I feel safe at school (NOT emotionally or physically intimidated or “picked on” by others)”; “I have heard offensive names/phrases (N-word, fag, ‘That’s so gay’, etc.) or offensive jokes about groups used at school”; “I have spoken these words or jokes”; and “If I felt threatened or bullied, I feel there is an administrator or faculty member who would listen to me.” Once the data were gathered, Keith gave members of the administration the report and revealed “the word that students are using most are in these particular areas.” In addition to leveraging the data to motivate dialogue about systemic change with the administration, Keith presented the data to students as part of a classroom guidance lesson and said, “‘Here’s the raw data; tell us what you notice’ and generally people seem to be saying ‘this a lot’ and we have conversations.’”

As a “member of the administrative team”, Keith also used data to circumvent some of the administrative responsibilities generally assigned to school counselors by advocating for his profession with colleagues in his department. He explained, “We have worked hard over the past half of the decade to present data and examples to our administration to show how we might be able to serve better in other ways as opposed to doing some non-counseling related activities.”



Through the data, they expressed to both administrators and the public, ““this is what we did for our classroom guidance, for our advocacy for our underrepresented groups.””

While use of data was an effective means of promoting systemic change for almost all participants, Amanda had a different experience. As Amanda explained, she worked with the school counseling department to implement a “survey with teachers and students and we asked students what they wanted to do, what they wanted to learn more about in advisement based on all the things that we covered.” Among the topics requested was “diversity” so they “talked about it as a committee, all decided that this was important.” Despite the “backup” from students and teachers, they were unable to secure approval for an LGBT-inclusive diversity curriculum. Amanda lamented, “I was really disappointed when we were not.”

### **iii. Establishing Safety**

Participants in this study took various steps to foster a positive school environment and to make explicit among students, parents and school personnel their willingness to serve as advocates for and with LGBT students. As Barry said, “I think that with the school setting, as I come alongside struggling students, LGBTQ, I’m the go-to person.” Likewise, because Brad was an “advocate out in public,” and also served as the “parent involvement coordinator and public relations coordinator”, he ensured that “...most people realize that I am an advocate for all students.” Vicky and Amanda expressed similar sentiments. Referring to members of the school faculty and staff, Vicky said, “I’ve become available to them...if you have questions, a difficult situation with a student, if there’s something you don’t understand....They know they can come to me for anything related to the LGBT topics.” Likewise, Amanda said, “Teachers know that I’m passionate about it” and added, “I feel like I’m the gay and lesbian counselor...they will send

kids to me if there are issues or if they have concerns...they come to me when they're not sure how to handle a situation.”

Because the participants had established themselves as a safe and competent person with regard to LGBT issues, teachers, administrators and other counselors often sought their advice and guidance. In fact, all of the participants talked about being the primary point of reference for situations involving LGBT students. Tasha recollected an exchange with a health teacher following an anti-LGBT bullying incident: “The coach came and talked to me and he was like, ‘I don't know how to handle this...I know that we probably need to talk about it but quite frankly I don't know how to do it.’” She also mentioned that fellow counselors, “would just bring the [LGBT] student into my office and we'd all kind of sit and have a conversation because they knew that this was something that I had a lot of experience with and...felt strongly about.” Similarly, Brad said about his school counseling colleagues, “Whenever an issue comes up...they’ll say, ‘I think you need to talk to this student’ just simply because I’ve been there, done that and had a lot more training than they have.” And Daniel expressed, “None of our counselors, I think, were afraid to...talk to kids about it but sometimes they would be like ‘I’m not sure how to advise them here or they’re asking me a question that I really don’t know.’”

In addition to establishing themselves as a competent person among faculty members, participants took steps to make their support for LGBT students explicit. Referring to LGBT students, Daniel expressed, “Kids figure out very quickly who it is that they can talk to in schools.... They hone in like little pigeons on people who they’ve identified in the building who they know will be supportive.” One way participants established safety among LGBT students was through visible displays of support in the form of stickers, posters, Pride flags and other resources in their office. For example, Barry explained that he placed a *Safe Space* sticker on his

window because, “I want them to know that they can come in there and it's okay to talk about it.” Tasha “always made sure that in my offices, you know, that I displayed a safe zone sticker” and added that “because I have the safe zone rainbow sticker, [students] would come and sit down and talk to me and say, 'Okay I know you're not my counselor but can I talk to you.'” Sara described her process for establishing safety among students in more detail:

I start with my office. I have symbols within my office—rainbows, pink triangles—just some little things that perhaps not everyone would pick up on or know but the students who are part of the LGBTQ community would recognize the symbols and know that I'm a person they can speak with. So that's how it starts and then, again, for me it's been word of mouth. Once one person found out that there was a safe counselor to talk to, students not from my caseload would come to me knowing that their friends had been well taken care of.

In addition, Sara mentioned that after establishing herself as a “safe person for students...more and more come to [her] to either out themselves, share the things that they're going through, ask for assistance and ask for help in communicating with their peers, with their teachers.”

Vicky insisted that, “Advocacy is not just a sign on the door; there's a whole climate that you need to help create in order for things to really work the way they should.” Nevertheless, she admitted the role of visible displays in creating such a climate visible displays, specifically with regard to her counseling group for LGBT students: “They see the gay flags.... The word gets around that I'm the cool one, you can go talk to her so I kept getting all the gay kids, all the gay kids, all the gay kids.... And every week 2 to 3 new ones come in.” Similarly, Melissa spoke about the impact of visible displays: “I had my rainbow things and all the things that shouted GLBTQ-friendly person and I waited...and finally they started coming one by one.” While

Amanda had a sticker on her filing cabinet, she admitted, “I would like to feel comfortable putting it on my door but I don’t...and I hate that.”

Stewart talked about the importance of “maintaining visibility as much as we can,” not only through visible displays but also with regard to his sexual orientation as a gay man by “keeping a picture of me and my partner on my desk... to say to students this is no different than anybody else having, you know, a picture of their husband or wife or their children on their desk.” Keith—who also identifies as gay—shared similar sentiments and expressed,

I think we need to, as LGBTQ counselors and teacher and individuals, be out. It makes a difference when a family comes in and sees just sitting there among all the papers is a picture of my partner and I together at Disney or something the way every other teacher or counselor would have...theirs. And I think just being a role model and visible is important.

### **E. Social/Political Advocacy**

Social/political advocacy occurred when participants worked to create change for and with LGBT students beyond the school level by community collaboration and engaging in legislative activism. This category was directly referred to in the ACA Advocacy Competencies as a domain under the public arena level of advocacy and addresses policy or legislative advocacy (Lewis, et al., 2002). Although community collaboration falls under a different level in the conceptual framework, social/political advocacy—as defined in this study—is inclusive of community collaboration.

#### **i. Community Collaboration**

Participants who engaged in community collaboration used their knowledge of “specific difficulties in the environment” (Lewis, et al., 2002, p. 2) to work in partnership with

organizations as a means to proactively create change. Ten of the 12 participants interviewed—with the exception of Barry and Bonnie—explicitly mentioned community engagement and collaboration when describing their advocacy efforts. According to documents provided by Melissa, she had established collaborative partnerships with local and state LGBT and social justice-related organizations, including those targeting youth and others focused on parents.

Most commonly, community collaboration often overlapped with participants' advocacy efforts within the school. For instance, Stewart partnered with a national organization that “has high school graduates from whatever high school they went to that are now out...come back to the school and talk about their experiences and what it means to be an out young adult in the world.” He added that students—“regardless of their identified orientation”—were “really interested in hearing about somebody who’s out in the world and doing what they wanted to do and living a life that was exciting and interesting to them.”

In addition, Vicky talked about several local groups and organizations with whom she collaborated on a variety of LGBT student-related issues. Speaking specifically about a local mental health organization, she explained, “They collaborate with us -- like they provide a counselor, a master’s level therapist that comes once a week and runs groups and she does individual, she does referral; they have a case manager that does case management.” Vicky also mentioned several other community groups with whom she had developed alliances:

A safe schools group provides all kinds of training. Another organization does mentorship and summer jobs. I mean we have a really good set up for these kids -- like there’s even a family specialist from the LGBT organization that I can send home to the kid’s home to work with the family if they’re open to it.

According to Vicky, her alliances with community organizations were especially beneficial for providing low-income LGBT students with access to mental health and other resources. As she described,

Accessing mental health programs and therapy...when you're poor it's next to impossible because the parents are working three jobs or there's no one to take the child anywhere or they're against taking him. They don't even want to talk about it or they beat the kid up. And when you're poor, everything gets complicated. That's why I appreciate the services that we have from the LGBT organization

Both Vicky and Melissa talked about collaborating with outside organizations to train the faculty because, as Melissa described, "I like to bring third party organizations from the outside because it's like anything: you listen to others before you listen to your own family and I'm close to everyone here." Similarly, when a transgender student at her school was in the process of transitioning, Jessica met with a "family advocate" from a local LGBT-rights organization. In addition to helping "the student get the access that he needed to the bathrooms", collaboration with the family advocate also yielded "a meeting with the student's teachers" to discuss "some of the issues that the student is dealing with."

Several of the participants reached out to community organizations as a means of seeking guidance and resources, primarily with regard to the GSA club. Stewart described his intention to take members of the GSA to a local LGBT youth center "so that they're familiar with it and they can see it and, you know, it's not so scary to go on your own." Jessica connected with organizations online as a means of obtaining resources for the GSA: "I've looked at the GSA Network to kind of get some ideas and GLSEN and reaching out to some contacts there."

Additionally, Amanda remembered that connection to a local organization had been “really helpful that first year when we were trying to get things going and connecting with resources.” However, as a school counselor working in a rural area, Amanda noted “there are very limited resources here.” Further, Amanda asserted that even the “limited resources” and organizations that did exist were not always willing to assist. For example, in response to the GSA- related backlash she received from administrators and community members, Amanda recalled reaching out to the counseling department for support. She explained, “I really wanted them to step up and support us in saying that we're doing the right thing. I really wanted that to happen and it didn't.” Underscoring the important role of community collaboration in rural schools, Amanda admitted,

There's a part of me that needs to be connected to something to keep me going sometimes because I just don't have it and it's like at what point do you just feel like nothing is ever going to change. In rural schools there needs to be more connection to colleges or some kind of regional collaborative or something going on.

Vicky, Sara, Melissa and Keith talked about involving students in collaborative efforts in the community. Vicky said that some of her LGBT and allied students “...do service. We did the cancer walk last year. We did the Pride Walk.” Likewise, through a university, Sara helped connect her students to opportunities for advocacy in the community. In particular, she referred to the president of the GSA who “sat on a committee to plan for the second annual leadership workshop” and was asked to create a website and Facebook group “for LGBTQ populations of all high schools in our district to communicate with one another.”

A few of the participants spoke about their membership in local, statewide and national LGBT-friendly groups and organizations. Melissa was actively involved as a volunteer for a

local LGBT youth organization while Keith was connected to several LGBT-affiliated organizations related to safe schools and counseling, respectively. His role in the former consisted of “planning” as well as “a lot of educational presentations.” Brad was also involved in national school counseling and counseling organizations, even holding a national position at one time. In addition, he often collaborated with a local LGBT-related group for parents, doing mostly speaking engagements. Brad also mentioned, “Having the different contacts and people knowing that, it helps me to advocate more.”

## **ii. Legislative Activism**

According to the ACA Advocacy Competencies, school counselors are tasked in determining which issues can most effectively be resolved through social/political action and, when appropriate, advocating for public policy reform in the public arena (Lewis, et al., 2002). Consistent with the stated macro-level perspective, Daniel expressed, “I think we have a role to advocate within a larger scale...for situations or areas where we see policy or practice that harms students or is not benefitting all of our students, you know, like with LGBT kids.” He also talked about the need for school counselors to leverage their “political savvy” to advocate for students. While all participants discussed the importance of inclusive policies and practices with regard to LGBT students, only Amanda, Melissa and Jessica engaged in legislative activism. Amanda’s legislative efforts occurred at the district level and were motivated by her district’s opposition to the GSA. As she explained,

The board members were not supportive of it so they actually had a closed meeting to talk about personnel recommendations and what I heard was that my name and the other counselor's name were the only ones that were pulled like into discussion for the possibility of non-renewal but that didn't happen.



Nevertheless, Amanda took steps to help board members recognize the importance role of a GSA for LGBT students. She asked students to write about why “this was important to them” and expressed, “We wanted to give it to board members...so they could understand it.” Although Amanda sent the students’ writings to board members, she admitted, “I don't know if the board members ever got it, you know, it may have been pulled.”

When Jessica first spoke with her principal about establishing a GSA, he expressed reluctance and said he would have to “talk to the Board of Education about it.” Nevertheless, Jessica was committed to advocate for the club before the Board should they oppose its existence. As she described, “I went home and I got piles of research and I was expecting the Board to tell us ‘no’ and I got all the reasons legally why they weren’t allowed to do that and was prepared to use it.” In addition, Jessica talked about her willingness to align with a local LGBT rights organization “as somebody on the inside” to lobby for an inclusive anti-bullying and harassment policy in her district. Of all the participants, Melissa was the only one who had actively advocated for an anti-bullying and harassment policy at the state level. Melissa described, “I was involved 2 years before the Bill was passed. We were involved in the campaign to get the Bill passed in the state.”

Reflecting on the difference between school-wide and legislative advocacy, Barry said, “It does feel like there’s the potential for change at the local level but...changing a policy or the wording on it, that does seem like a larger mountain to climb and how do we climb that?”

#### **F. Advocacy as Purpose-Driven**

“Advocacy as purpose-driven” describes an intrinsically motivated, unconditional commitment to students’ needs. In this study, “advocacy as purpose-driven” encompasses essence of being, motivation for advocacy, confronting adversity, and a desire to do more.

Participants discussed an inherent responsibility to advocate for all students regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity and expression despite obstacles that may arise. Expressing an unwavering dedication to advocacy, Jessica made clear that she would “do it regardless” of circumstance or opposition. Participants also acknowledged that they could—and should—be doing more to advocate for and with LGBT students. Although advocacy as purpose-driven is not addressed by the conceptual framework, the data from this study indicate that it impacts the degree to which school counselors advocate with LGBT students, the implications of which will be further explored in the discussion section.

#### **i. Essence of Being**

All the participants in this study viewed advocacy and social justice as part of their character. As Daniel said, “It’s the core of my being; it’s how I was raised.” He also expressed, “I mean it is just innately who you are....I advocate for kids; I just feel like we need to advocate for kids, advocating for better minority achievement, better access to minority and low SES students. It’s just who I am.” Similarly, Amanda stated, “I’ve always been interested in issues related to diversity” and added, “I’m one of those personality types that’s extremely sensitive...to the stories of other people...and I want to be able to make things better for them so I think it’s...just sort of part of who I am.” Amanda talked about her continuous interest in issues of diversity and social justice:

I was an anthropology major before I was a school counselor and even when I was younger I was very interested in the needs of others and I took a sign language class in high school and I took an Arabic class in college.

Jessica also discussed how her childhood shaped her disposition for advocacy, stating, “I think a lot of it has to do with my upbringing...I just strongly believe that all people are valuable

regardless.” She then added, “I should have been born in the sixties, at a sit-in, whatever. Put me there; I’m good.” Also referring to the impact of her upbringing on her advocacy efforts, Melissa said, “I was raised to see the beauty in all people.” Tasha stated, “I’m just very much a social justice, equality kind of person and that’s just my general mindset.” Sara shared similar sentiments, asserting, “I’ve always been all about human rights and equality” and added, “It’s just that ongoing principle of human equality, that everyone deserves to be treated with respect, everyone deserves to feel good about themselves, to accept themselves and that’s just my unifying theme.” In comparable fashion, Bonnie talked about advocacy as “something that I’ve always kind of had, that I’ve always just kind of liked and felt like I was good at.”

Participants described how their passion for advocacy pushed them to challenge adversity. Amanda asserted,

If kids are not protected, to me it's always implied and I'm going to fight it. If I feel like something is not happening in the best interests of kids, I'm going to bring it up and I'm going to be like, ‘We have to do this.’

Vicky, who identifies as a lesbian, admitted, “I defended gay kids even when I didn’t know I was gay” and said, “Me and many other school counselors here that are straight, we go to bat for these kids no matter what; we’ll confront whoever needs to be confronted.”

Melissa spoke about advocacy as a “calling” and said that while advocacy for and with LGBT students can be enforced or encouraged “in terms of guidelines and regulations, “you can’t impress this upon someone’s heart.” Referring to upholding ethical standards for advocacy with all students, Jessica expressed, “I think in our profession I think you have to. I don’t know. I feel like it’s in you or else you wouldn’t be doing this.” She further stated, “I think counselors have the unique ability—at least the ones I’ve seen—to separate themselves from their personal

beliefs....I do feel like my colleagues, although they have their own beliefs, are very open to supporting all students.”

While participants agreed that most of their colleagues upheld at least the minimal ethical standards for advocacy related to LGBT students, they were not as likely to be proactive and did not share the same degree of dedication. For instance, Tasha explained that her fellow school counseling colleagues “didn't have the same passion and burning desire to seek change” but explained,

If a negative occurrence had happened, they would have absolutely jumped on it, tried to make a change, you know, that kind of stuff but from a proactive stance, I would say that they were completely on board but didn't have a burning desire to, you know, grab the torch and run.

Also talking about his colleagues, Brad asserted, “They’re very accepting. Now the ones that I work with, they don’t go and speak and do presentations and that sort of thing but they are very accepting, very supportive of the students. They don’t discriminate.” Likewise, Keith said, “I have come across most counselors who have grown to be at least more open...but don't feel like they have the tools or know what to do or choose not to [advocate], particularly when it comes to...LGBT students.” With regard to her school counseling department, Sara mentioned, “there were a couple that would respect, would keep the student’s confidentiality and respect their privacy but as a whole the guidance department...for the most part leans toward the...view that out of sight, out of mind.” More specifically, the message she received from her colleagues was one of indifference and reactivity over proactivity. As Sara put it, “if you don’t ask [about LGBT issues] then you don’t have to address it.”

## **ii. Motivation**

In addition to demonstrating a general disposition for advocacy, participants in this study described the factors that motivated and sustain their advocacy efforts for and with LGBT students. For Bonnie, it was “the love of seeing students achieve and excel and reach their goals.” Vicky simply stated, “Because the kids deserve it, because how could I abandon them? I couldn’t do that.” Likewise, Melissa explained, “Many times people will say to me, ‘why are you such an advocate?’ My answer is it is for me unconscionable to think that a child...should be in such profound pain and completely and totally alone. This can’t be.”

For Keith, Daniel, Vicky and Stewart—all of whom identify as gay or lesbian—their identity and personal experiences shaped their roles as advocates for and with LGBT students. For example, Stewart claimed that his motivation for advocacy was partly his “own identity” while Vicky asserted, “I know what it’s like, being gay myself.”

Recollecting his experiences as a young gay male, Daniel said, “Well I think personally as a gay man who is out...I was able to look on my experiences throughout that and sort of saw where systems could have been better for me, where there could have been support.” He then added, “There were certainly times in just sort of my own personal development where I said... ‘It would have been great if this service would have been available to me.’ There was no, there was no GSA, there was no support for anybody in my high school in that regard.”

Keith shared similar sentiments:

Because I am gay and I went to a very conservative school growing up and it wasn't something that you could think about or talk about or be and I felt how isolating and how it actually turned my life in some directions that were a challenge for me for a while. I think that is personal. I think because of that it has made me more likely to have conversations and be open for students who are low socioeconomic, for our Black

students, for our Muslim students and to be more open and aware of what it's like to be different and isolated and not to be where the system isn't really supporting you.

Barry—a straight male—talked about his adolescent experiences as a target of bullying as motivating his current efforts for social justice. He recalled, “I experienced times when I was mistreated. My locker was blocked because guys were hanging out there and I couldn't get to it.” Above all else, Barry mentioned faith as his most significant motivator. In particular, he stated, “I have seen Christ advocate....so to me that was the greatest model of advocacy and that provides the motivation now to be in a position where if there is injustice, I can be a part of that and help.” For Tasha who identifies as heterosexual but has many LGBT friends, her motivation for advocacy was also personal: “I think because so many of my friends did identify with that community, it just sort of felt like home to me; it felt like I guess sort of a way to pay back the people that I love.” Having a lesbian sister and attending a high school where her fellow LGBT classmates were “really, really, really treated unjustly” further fueled her passion to advocate for and with LGBT students.

In addition to personal experiences, the realization of systemic injustice against LGBT students in their schools prompted participants to take action. Brad expressed, “I reckon having dealt with situations in a prior school district that I worked in where I saw discrimination happen based on LGBTQ, faculty and students not being accepted or made to feel demeaned.” In similar fashion, “fires were lit” in Daniel when we witnessed “adults that were either allowing things to happen or for things to be said and not really challenging them but even more so when they were contributing themselves to the problem.” As he recalled,

That’s the real issue was when you have adults themselves who are contributing to a sentiment that is against LGBT kids, that doesn’t believe that in fact it may even be their

role to, you know, toughen them up or to let them know it's wrong or to pray it away from them which has happened. You know that's where I think I really got very, very concerned so then by advocating for GSAs, by advocating for helping to support GSAs, by finding references and resources and their families through it was sort of how I guess I just fell into it.

Referring to advocacy for and with LGBT students, Melissa stated that she had been drawn “naturally into it by my own personal experiences.” She recalled one story in particular as having opened her eyes to the systemic inequities facing LGBT students and prompting her to create change. As she described,

I had a young man who...was not conforming to the gender stereotypes for males and he was getting a good deal of grief for it and I used my best counseling skills and I do think I made a difference for him but...I was already painfully aware that we weren't meeting his needs and had he remained in school, I may have been able to help more but he actually was a casualty of the what I'm going to call a push-out system based on attendance. He wasn't attending regularly and I, I wanted him to stay in school.....I had the awareness that there was a specialized need there, that there was an at-risk population that I was prepared to use my best skills for.

### **iii. Confronting Adversity**

All participants talked about having to navigate varying degrees of resistance from school personnel, parents and community members. Referring to her school, Sara indicated, “It wasn't a culture in which I felt I had any support for the advocacy” and added, “There is still really a struggle to acknowledge and accept this population of students. I think the students themselves, the entire student population, is far more accepting of the LGBTQ community than the adults on

the campus.” For example, she expressed that at the school’s club fair, “teachers, after seeing their students sitting at our booth...were more standoffish with them and so we had a number of emotional things that came up there toward the end of the school year.” Sara further explained, “We also had parents come by the same booth at the same event and give the kids a glare, kind of a look of non-acceptance.” Sara confessed that the situation created challenges that she “...didn’t feel equipped to handle and help the students with.” In addition to facing resistance from administrators at a previous school, Keith described,

Over a period of time, a school board member became very upset that I was supporting LGBTQ students and started an investigation...and I simply said to the principal, ‘If there's anybody upset with what we're doing on Monday, let's bring in you, the parents, the teachers and anyone who's upset and let's have a conversation about what they're upset about.’

Keith later noted, “As it turns out, the parents were not upset with anything that was going on.”

Melissa, Amanda, Sara and Jessica confronted resistance in response to the GSA or LGBT counseling group with which they were involved. For example, Amanda talked about feeling as if she always needed to defend or legitimate the club’s existence when faculty members asked, “‘Why do you need this? I don't get this. You don't need a club for straight people.’” She then added, “I always feel like everyone they want an explanation of why this is important and they really just don't get it.” Similarly, Melissa admitted to having to “struggle sometimes to be allowed to do these groups” during the school day. As she recalled,

An administrator said... ‘You have to do them after school.’ I said, ‘I am happy to do them after school but I can’t do them after school because how does a kids explain why they have to, why their survival depends on staying after school to a parent who will



possibly throw them out or beat them or ex-communicate them because they're gay? If my kids could stay after school, they would stay after school.' So I had to build a case, I had to do research; I had to prove a case.

Vicky was also confronted with administrative hostility when she first established a counseling group for LGBT and questioning students, confessing, "We were in a lot of silence at that time because the principal was against it and parents...did not understand." Recollecting her exchange with the principal, Vicky said, "He wanted to fire me actually and the downtown called me and said, 'There's another school that really needs a group counselor. Why don't you just go there?' ....And I said, 'no I'm staying, I'm staying.'" Despite the current administrative support Vicky receives for the counseling group, Vicky made clear that there still exists resistance for the group on the part of parents. As a result, Vicky admitted to signing group counseling consent forms for "parents that do not agree with their child going to counseling for sexual orientation issues," though she assured that doing so was still within the school's guidelines.

Jessica shared a similar situation involving teachers' and administrators' reluctance to embrace the GSA. A couple of colleagues asked, "'Don't you think this is going to be a problem?' and questioned me about acceptance...so I think there was some hostility initially. They weren't quite sure how loud and proud they were going to be." Her principal also warned "'there's going to be pushback.'" Nevertheless, Jessica was prepared to take the risk and responded, "I understand that; it doesn't matter....Whatever the pushback, I relish it- like, push back, talk to me about it; I'm fine." In addition to reluctant faculty members, Sara confessed, "There's been some resistance with parents. I've had members of the group have to drop out, allies that have been directed by their parents to disassociate with the group."

Of all the participants, Amanda faced the most hostility and resistance after agreeing to help create and co-sponsor a GSA at her school. Holding back tears, she recalled, “It turned out to be one of the most divisive things that...has happened in the school district....It just pulled out a really, really ugly side of this county and honestly it was the worst year of my life.” Shortly after the club was established, Amanda explained,

The community turned on me...I got letters accusing me of being a pedophile. I got letters, you know, all kinds of letters from the district that were from community members in the district and some of it was church-led and church-organized and so some powerful forces were going against this club.....The principal was willing to let it happen...there was a lot of divisiveness in the faculty as well and so people were chatting, people were talking about it a lot in the hallways and in the community and people were talking about me. I had worked here for a few years and I had good relationships with people and all of a sudden people did not have relationships with me or were talking about me behind my back or were all of a sudden saying that I must be gay, you know, and so it was very difficult....When I saw that people who had worked in the school district with me who I had worked well with started organizing against me, that was hard to take.

Amanda emphasized that working in such a hostile environment helped her “realize that every day can be hell for some of these kids...and they need a place,” and added, “That's what kept me here for so long...It's like I was pissed and I was determined.” While the club “sustained itself for a few years,” they were asked to “remain very quiet about it.” Since then, rules for creating and maintaining a club have become more stringent; as a result, the GSA is no longer active. Amanda said, “It feels to me like it's an intentional barrier.” Responding to the resistant faculty,

Amanda confessed, “I think there are some program level things that need to happen but it's really, really, really hard to get approval for those things in a rural school district” adding, “There’s such a disconnect, I think, when you’re in a rural community....At the faculty level there’s this sense of denial that multiculturalism is important and...I think the faculty just don't recognize.”

Brad, also from a rural community, said, “You have to be careful if you’re out in the community what you say because, you know...there’s a church on every corner that they believe that homosexuality is a sin.” He further confessed, “You do run into those people that are what I call “Southern Bible Beaters” who sometimes throw their religion in these students’ faces. I’ve had that happen on occasion.” While anti-religious sentiment was more pervasive among participants who worked in rural school settings, participants in both urban and suburban school settings were also confronted with religious resistance. Tasha, who worked at a suburban school, said, “Almost always the biggest push-back I got...the defense was always, 'This is a sin or this is wrong and this is why'. And in a lot of those instances you couldn't get people to engage in real conversation.” She also added, “Unfortunately people who want to use that argument, use that argument as a way to completely shut off and not listen anymore and so it becomes difficult to have a real dialogue because it's very much one-sided.” Jessica, also employed in a suburban school district, asserted, “I don’t mean that if you’re religious and faithful you can’t also be supportive but in this county it feels that way to me....I do feel like that’s a barrier to acceptance.” Daniel even talked about resistance from other school counselors on the basis of religion. Specifically, he stated,

I find that this issue- counselors will support freedom of religion; counselors will support students from other cultures, believe it is their role to advocate for them, support students

of low SES. This issue though, some of them will go to, 'My values say that that's not correct' and that's where I feel like we have a disconnect as a profession. This one is different than all these others that you want to support and advocate for and believe in as part of your training.

He also mentioned that there was incongruity "between professional responsibility and professional ethics with regard to using...a personal faith system around these issues" and asserted, "It's going to take hard conversations and I think they need to continue at the national level and on the way down."

Some participants also discussed specific hostility and resistance to transgender students. Referring to one student in particular, Jessica said, "There was some initial resistance to, 'Why should this student have access to a special bathroom...We're going to open the door to students who are feeling weary about using the bathroom, wanting to use a special bathroom.'" Amanda also faced a resistant faculty when she advocated for a gender-affirming bathroom for a transgender student. Despite ultimately reaching a solution, she explained,

Because our superintendent...wanted her to use the male restroom because she was biologically male but and I always said in the world she's using the female restroom but he didn't feel like we could allow that and there wasn't support at the principal level for that. We didn't have a single stall bathroom that was for students and I said we really need one. And so what we ended up doing was the faculty restroom.

Sara expressed that "The administration was encouraging teachers to refer to students by their legal name and not the name that they chose to go by." In addition, she mentioned that "Some teachers accept calling a student by their chosen name and some insist that if this is your legal name, I'm going to call you this."

Bonnie and Barry talked about lack of sensitivity on the part of administrators when dealing with LGBT student-related issues. For example, after attempting to obtain services for a transgender student, Bonnie explained that "...the assistant principal...was my biggest challenge in that... he didn't buy into a lot of the social/emotional problems that our students have." Similarly, Barry expressed, "With administrators, things are more cut and dry; there's not a lot of gray or wiggle room....or they may provide a referral but the sensitivity or the support, the emotional support is not there as much."

Vicky, Jessica, Barry and Sara shared specific strategies they use when confronted with adversity. Vicky explained, "I work on their heart because everybody has a heart...and I would say 99% of the time that there's a little seed that's planted at least." She seemed to take a similar approach with parents, using counseling as a means of bringing parents to a place of affirmation. Referring to parents' responses when they first learn that their children are LGBT, Vicky noted, "At the beginning most everyone freaks out...but then slowly but surely they come around with a little counseling, coming to see me." Likewise, Brad recalled a specific example involving a mother who was having difficulty coming to terms with her daughter's sexual orientation. As he described, "After, having worked with that parent and talked to that parent about unconditional love for the child...we actually built a bond there. The mother learned to accept—she still didn't agree with it—but she learned to accept it." Instead of focusing on emotion as Brad and Vicky did, Sara responded to hostility by "...referring to research on the web and materials specifically back to GLSEN, programs that bring others into the knowing and into the acceptance of our group." She also expressed,

Even if I have to initially approach my advocacy as initially human rights and equality, I can start with that and then move into the specifics of the LGBTQ population. It gives me

a great starting point with parents, helping them to consider the possibilities, helping them to better understand the position that society is taking as a whole, to clear up some of the myths and the misconceptions that really today's parents grew up with.

When confronted with parental resistance, Amanda explained, "Schools are for everybody. We need to make sure we offer safe schools for all students, including gay students." She then added, "That usually kind of nips it, you know, they don't say anything more." Barry said that rather than "getting in a debate" with colleagues, he focuses on addressing the situation "in a way I feel is appropriate."

#### **iv. Desire to Do More**

Although participants demonstrated a commitment to—and track record of—advocacy for and with LGBT students, they aspired to take additional steps to foster safer, more affirming learning environments for LGBT students. Recognizing the prevalence of religious resistance his LGBT-identified students faced, Keith said, "The goal—we haven't done it yet—is to bring in some speakers who are from some churches just so they can talk about...what it's like." Bonnie, Jessica and Amanda spoke specifically about their intentions to display LGBT-affirming materials in their respective schools in order to engender a culture of safety and respect for LGBT students. Bonnie, who oversaw her school's anti-bullying and harassment initiative, expressed, "That's one of the things on our agenda is to put more visual awareness out so...it's yearlong; it's every single day." Similarly, Jessica stated, "I think one of the big things is something as simple as each of us having the Safe Space sticker" and described her upcoming plans to cultivate a safer school climate for LGBT students across identity groups: "So that's my next step: within our counseling office to let kids know that it's a safe space but then also school-wide, start being more inclusive of students who may need us but don't know that we're there."

On a systemic level, Jessica also talked about wanting to, “push a little bit more” but explained her limitations: “I’m not the department chair so, you know, you can only do so much from a department level.”

Amanda, who worked in a rural school, was eager to “be a more vocal advocate” for and with LGBT students yet, like Jessica, was realistic about the barrier that may complicate her efforts. She said, “I don’t feel like I’m as successful as I’d like to be and I’d like to be doing much more...but I feel like there are roadblocks.” Recognizing the importance of community collaboration and educating school personnel in achieving her desired plans she noted,

I feel like there are ways that you need to figure out how to get community members on board. In some ways it also means we need to get teachers on board with recognizing diversity is real and important and school safety is important and school safety looks different to different kids.

To that end, Amanda expressed, “I would love to do a safe space training...I don’t know if it would get approved but I’m considering presenting it to see, maybe making it not required but voluntary- I don’t know but I think that would be important.”

Referring to her desire to facilitate trainings in the community, Vicky said, “In general I would love to do more for advocacy for the general population like workshops.” Barry spoke both about short and long-term goals, beginning first with his school and extending to the district level: “My goal is to sweep the porch of my school but I do see that there’s a need at some point to sweep more schools, to kind of or maybe have the district be a part of that.” Similarly, a document provided by Melissa demonstrated her plans to advocate for and with LGBT students in collaboration with her colleagues at the district level. Initiatives included expanding professional development to “instructional, non-instructional, and non-school based

professionals”, broadening student awareness campaigns, designing and implementing trainings for administrators, expanding “website presence” as well as resources for parents.

## **G. Support**

Participants in this study expressed the impact of support—or the lack thereof—on their advocacy efforts for and with LGBT students. Forms of support included faculty and district-level support as well as inclusive student non-discrimination and anti-bullying policies.

### **i. Faculty and District-Level Support**

Of all the factors that facilitated participants’ advocacy efforts, faculty and district-level support were the most significant. For instance, Daniel noted, “Because I’m in a school system that understands the roles of school counselors and values our work, I am very fortunate because I can manage a caseload of kids and do advocacy work and it doesn’t break my back.” In addition, Keith indicated that his accomplishments would not have been possible without a “network” and added “I mean I had the support of other people...so I don’t know if I could do it alone.” For Stewart, it was much easier to engage in LGBT-related advocacy because of “the staff and the staff’s commitment to those principles [of diversity and social justice].” Likewise, Tasha described the extent to which a supportive administration enables her work for and with LGBT students, particularly as it relates to educating faculty members:

Supportive administration is one of the best things in the world because if you've got supportive administration, you can get to your teachers. And there are always teachers... that are supportive of the effort but if you can't get to the faculty at large, you don't necessarily know who those people are and so a supportive administration sort of allows you to in pre-planning or on a teacher work day sort of give a presentation and start the discussion among faculty and it brings out those people who want to be involved and



want to be supportive and that is hugely important because if I know who those teachers are, I can also direct kids to those teachers.

In comparable fashion, Sara asserted that what most aids her advocacy with LGBT students “by far” is “having administrative approval and acceptance.” Jessica, who worked at a conservative suburban school, eventually received support from her principal despite his initial resistance to the establishment of a GSA. Jessica mentioned, “I was impressed with our principal because he did check in with me at various times throughout the year to...make sure they felt supported, to see if there was anything he could do so that was change.” With regard to her advocacy efforts with a transgender student, Bonnie ensured, ““Everybody was on board. The clinic was on board, the administration was on board and it was like, ‘What are we going to do to help this student be successful?’”

Brad—who worked in a rural, conservative area—admitted that having a collaborative counselor/principal partnership “helps me to advocate because if I see something going on that’s not right and the students are not getting what they need, I’m very comfortable going to my administrator.” He further expressed that because of his principal’s support, “I don’t have as much difficulty; that’s not a roadblock for me.... It helps...knowing that I can go to my principal and my principal will support me.” In particular, he said, “I’ve had situations where a student didn’t get what they needed and I would go and talk with the principal and, you know, further try to help the student.” In contrast, Amanda, who also worked in a rural school, did not have the support from her administrator. And while the majority of her colleagues in the school were also not supportive, she noted that part of what facilitates her advocacy efforts for and with LGBT students across identity groups was “support” and added, “I think we have a pretty great counseling staff right now.”

Despite receiving support at the district level, Sara, who was employed at a suburban school, also did not have support from her administration. She had, however, worked at schools where “there is a very positive message coming from the administration that all people are to be treated equal, all people are to feel respected and people are encouraged to be who they are.” Having had the experience of working in two such distinct school settings, Sara expressed,

It’s my belief that if you don’t have that at the top, you can’t have it anywhere else.... I had much more support among my colleagues at other schools in the sense of promoting the GSA and working with the students and advocating for the students. And I had colleagues at other schools- administration and teachers just embraced the idea of developing a Gay-Straight Alliance on campus. So, again, that spoke to me very much of the different cultures there on campuses and reinforces that I think the only chance for success comes from having those at the top insist on the equality.

After experiencing hostility related to his advocacy efforts with LGBT students, Keith deliberately sought out schools that would be supportive. He explained, “The next school when I went to be hired, I let them know my advocacy interests and the next two of three schools hired me knowing that and wanted that actually embedded into their schools.”

Vicky and Melissa—both of whom had extensive experience working with LGBT students in their schools—were employed in a district that highly encouraged advocacy for and with LGBT across identity groups. Additionally, the current administrators at their schools were very supportive and, as Vicky described “amazing.” Both Vicky and Melissa indicated that their work with LGBT students was made easier by a supportive administration. Despite her positive experiences, Melissa made clear that some of her colleagues at other schools within the same

district “don’t feel that they have the blessing of their site administrator to do the work” and that some schools “aren’t as receptive.”

Referring to his fellow faculty members, Keith noted, “I’m motivated because I have other people doing support.” Specifically, he recalled on incident involving the coach for the basketball team:

One time the GSA I sponsored couldn't meet in the room we were supposed to meet...so they went and asked another teacher. Well he happened to also be the school's varsity basketball coach and traditionally basketball coaches have not always been the most supportive...Well he made a special effort to help them set up the video, make sure that they had everything in line and said, 'If you all ever need to use my room again, you all just let me know; I'm glad to have you in here.' And then left and I spoke with him about a year later after that incident, how it stood out and he said, “Yeah I really wanted them to see that I was supportive of them even though I couldn't stay and be a part of their meeting.”

Similarly, Jessica expressed that it helps to know she has the “support of my fellow counselors and at least one other teacher, my co-advisor.” She also noted, “I’ve had a lot of support from schools when I’ve contacted them for different things.” Referring to colleagues in her district who were in the process of establishing a GSA, Jessica said, “I’ve had them call me and say, “That’s fantastic that you guys are doing that; we want to get it started here” so it’s been good.” For Amanda, it was important to receive validation for a school counseling curriculum that was inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. She noted, “Our curriculum director...sort of helps guide and helps other people recognize if we need to do something or not.”

## **ii. LGBT-Inclusive Student Policies**

As defined in this study, an LGBT-inclusive student policy refers to a district-level anti-bullying and/or harassment policy or a non-discrimination policy that is inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students. A review of public documents indicated that of all the participants, only three—Jessica, Tasha, and Amanda—worked in school districts that were devoid of a comprehensive, fully enumerated anti-bullying and harassment policy and/or an LGBT-inclusive student non-discrimination policy. Brad’s school district included student protections based on sexual orientation but not gender identity. Further, only one participant—Bonnie—was unaware of whether or not LGBT student-related policies existed within her school district. Nevertheless, all participants agreed that LGBT-inclusive student non-discrimination and anti-bullying policies played an important role in opening the door for more effective and expansive advocacy efforts for and with LGBT students across identity groups. Vicky noted, “If you have the law backing you up, everything is easier for that counselor.” Daniel insisted that LGBT-inclusive policies can especially make a difference “for people who are on the fence,” in particular because “it really kind of allows them to see that there are supports in place.”

Vicky reflected on how implementation of inclusive student policies have impacted her practice, saying “There was no laws back then either because now I can throw the law out to your face. ‘You don’t like it? Well I’m sorry it’s the law.’” Referring to school counselors who are new to the profession, Vicky added,

They don’t know what it was like in the eighties and nineties, you know, to try to advocate for these kids and, you know, people throw the Bible at you and all kinds of stuff at you and now you can say, ‘Well that’s how you feel. I have my opinion. We all have our opinions but it’s the law.’ Now you can say it’s the law.

Similarly, Keith claimed, “I think that the policy makes it so that I can do my work in other places.” In particular, he said,

When I am talking about with ninth grade students, you know, we just treat people right. I don't care if you're smaller and I'm bigger. I don't care if you're gay and I'm straight and I can throw that into the conversation as a natural part of it and not 'he said gay word'. It's just in there and I think it's because of the policies and it's definitely a part of the effectiveness and impact of doing it.

For Brad, who worked in a rural, conservative area, the inclusive policies in his district played an especially significant role in facilitating his advocacy and therefore improving the experiences of LGBT students. As he noted, “I think we are far beyond other people because of just the fact of having that policy.” Brad further expressed, “Without this policy you don’t have that leverage...I just think we’re very fortunate to have it -- especially in this area.” He recalled working in “a school district that didn’t have this policy and there were no protections for the students who were LGBTQ or staff members for that matter.” As such, Brad asserted that “having that policy...makes a huge difference because you can use it for leverage in protecting the students and advocating for the students.” He described a couple of scenarios where the policy served as “leverage” to advocate for LGBT students. In particular, he recounted an exchange with a parent:

I had the parents come in and wanted me to keep their daughter away from this girl that she was dating and of course I can’t do that. I explained to the parents quickly, ‘Look, you know, I respect your point of view; however, we have a policy in our school district that protects students and that’s not allowed.’

He also mentioned that while faculty members “have their own views, of course they don’t voice them, mostly because of the policy.” In similar fashion, Keith predicted that part of his success in

“building up a coalition” of support with faculty is because “they see that this is our system’s belief and that they are more likely to be a part of it.”

In addition to LGBT-inclusive student-related policies, Vicky and Melissa worked in a district that funded efforts aimed at LGBT-specific professional development. Most notably, the district included as part of their budget the establishment a network of educators—one liaison from each high school and middle school—“that receive specialized professional development focused on building expertise in program development and delivery of these comprehensive services...provided with the focus of increasing resiliency, self-esteem, and school/social/familial supports.” Through the support of this policy, both Vicky and Melissa served as the liaison to LGBT students and families within their schools and were arguably the most proactive among the participants in advocacy for and with LGBT students.

Although most of the participants worked in school districts with LGBT-inclusive student policies, none of them lived in states with LGBT-inclusive laws for schools. For Keith, such a discrepancy presented a conflict between his school district and the state. Referring specifically to issues of gender identity and expression, Keith explained,

The NCAA came out a couple of years ago with new policies for transgender athletes that is much more progressive and supportive of transgender athletes but our local district is still getting pushback from our state because we're in a very conservative region and it's not my school system that's trying to do it; it's the athletic region in which we are participants.

Likewise, while Brad’s school district protected students on the basis of sexual orientation, he was quick to point out, “In our state if they wanted to fire you because you’re gay or lesbian or whatever, they could.”

Sara, Tasha, and Amanda—all of whom worked in districts without policies protecting LGBT students—also recognized the value of an inclusive student policy. In particular, Jessica asserted that her largest barrier to advocacy was the “lack of inclusion” in her district’s policy. Sara described inclusive policies as “the guiding principle” and expressed the need for “having the laws and the higher powers-that-be help those of us that are trying to advocate, give us support and offer the support we need to address the resistance,” adding that “it helps those us who are down in the trenches.” Tasha shared similar sentiments:

I think it's important that those things are included in the policies because if they're not included it becomes much easier to sort of gloss over infractions if they happen so if it's specifically delineated, it makes it much easier to advocate for a student who is potentially being discriminated against or is being bullied or harassed based on those things.

Having worked with affirming faculty and administrators within a welcoming school, Tasha also pointed out, “I think sort of the climate and just general education of the adults in the building and the school population. I think those things are much more impactful than some language in a policy.”

In addition to policies that protect LGBT students, Keith, who identifies as gay, asserted that nondiscrimination policies are important for LGBT and allied educators that want to advocate because it “decides whether or not the queer faculty member will be out and be role models and whether the straight employees feel that they can stand up.” Further, Keith included an LGBT-inclusive nondiscrimination policy for faculty members in his job search criteria. When asked to speak at the Chamber of Commerce at a nearby school district, he told the audience,

When I was looking for a job, I didn't look in your school system. I looked at these other two because they have non-discrimination policies and so I had to make my entire search down to these two school systems...There may be people like me who would love to live in this area that are not being considered. Then what about the people who already do who could be role models who are afraid to be role models?

Regardless of the policy, participants remained steadfast in their commitment to serve as advocates for and with LGBT students across identity groups. Barry assured, “It doesn't change how I respond to LGBTQ kids coming in and treating it as if there was another reason they were being harassed or bullied or picked on or whatever.” Similarly, Keith asserted, “I would be doing this work despite inclusive policies but they impact my effectiveness.” When their advocacy “effectiveness” improved through LGBT-inclusive student policies, participants agreed that LGBT students’ school experiences were positively impacted.

## **H. Summary**

The experiences of participants in this study as advocates for and with LGBT students were shaped, motivated and sustained by a variety of factors. While the extent and manner to which participants engaged in advocacy differed, six common themes emerged from the data: (1) student advocacy, (2), education as advocacy, (3) systems advocacy, (4) social/political advocacy, (5) advocacy as purpose-driven, and (6) support. Chapter V will critically examine these themes within the context of existing scholarship and provide implications for research, practice, counselor education, and policy.



## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

Although school counselors are uniquely positioned to serve as advocates for all youth (ASCA, 2005; Ratts, et al., 2007), there exist only five empirical studies (Field, 2004; Fitch & Marshall, 2004; Holmberg-Abel, 2012; Schaeffer, et al., 2010; Singh, et al., 2010) to date regarding school counselor advocacy in general and none related to LGBT students in particular. This qualitative dissertation study was designed to examine the experiences of 12 high school counselors who have served as advocates for and with LGBT students in order to gain a deeper understanding of how high school counselors engage in advocacy for and with LGBT students across identity groups and what factors encourage or hinder their advocacy efforts. Participants were selected from urban, rural, and suburban high school settings across the southeastern United States as a means of both obtaining a more representative sample set and investigating the impact of context on advocacy. This study was guided by a social justice education theoretical framework, the ACA Advocacy Competencies, the pilot study, previous literature and three overarching research questions:

- 1.) How do school counselors define advocacy within the framework of school counseling?
- 2.) How do school counselors advocate for and with LGBT students across identity groups?
- 3.) How do school counselors describe factors that facilitate and impede advocacy for and with LGBT students?

Participants in this study engaged in advocacy at various levels and to varying degrees both with and on behalf of LGBT students across identity groups. Unique to this study was the use of social justice education to explore, analyze, and more thoroughly understand the phenomenon of school counselor advocacy for and with LGBT students across identity groups

and at various levels through the framework of the ACA Advocacy Competencies. Specifically, the multi-level, student-centered emphases of both SJE and the ACA Advocacy Competencies provided a structure through which to examine advocacy behaviors at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels both with and on behalf of students. A careful analysis of the data, informed by the conceptual framework, pilot study, and research questions, generated six thematic categories which provide further insight on the advocacy behaviors of school counselors and the various factors which impact how and the extent to which they advocate for and with LGBT students across identity groups and in various school settings: (1) student advocacy, (2) education as advocacy, (3) systems advocacy, (4) social/political advocacy, (5) advocacy as purpose-driven, and (6) support. One finding in particular emerged as a unique category in this study: advocacy as purpose-driven. Also notable was the impact of religious resistance on participants' advocacy efforts and on LGBT students' experiences, including at the intersection of race and ethnicity. Further, findings in this study about the role of LGBT-inclusive student policies on school counseling practice as well as considerations related to advocacy for and with LGBT students of color and those from low-income families also present significant contributions to the literature. The remainder of Chapter V will include a discussion of the results as they relate to the research questions. Implications, limitations of the study, and suggestions for further research will also be discussed.

### **A. Advocacy Definition**

Overall, participants in this study described advocacy—both in general and for and with LGBT students—as both reactive and proactive, individually-led and collaborative. Participants defined advocacy as principally student-centered. Consistent with the ACA Advocacy Competencies and the systemic, student-centered lens of SJE (Adams, 2012; Love, 2000), they

described advocacy as occurring with and on behalf of students at the micro, meso-, and macro-level (Ratts, et al., 2007). In particular, they emphasized the importance of engendering among students their own sense of agency and making them aware of barriers that may impede their academic success and psychosocial wellbeing, a form of advocacy reflected in both the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Lewis, et al., 2002) and in social justice education literature (Love, 2000). While participants primarily spoke about advocacy in relation to meeting students' needs, they also underscored the importance of advocating for their profession as a means of obtaining the time, resources, and approval for systemic and/or proactive initiatives – a practice encouraged by the ASCA National Model (2005).

Participants also defined advocacy as working with parents, school personnel and members of the community and viewed student advocacy as a professional and ethical obligation. Participants spoke about advocacy for and with all students but particularly those with marginalized identities including students of color, students with disabilities and those from low-income families. Related, they viewed education as an important component of advocacy and highlighted the need to create awareness about students' needs as a means of changing the school climate, garnering support and obtaining access to resources.

In addition, advocacy was described as providing support to students and families and, when necessary, taking steps to motivate systemic change. While school counseling models and recent reforms within the profession have called upon school counselors to be agents of systemic change in their schools and communities (Brown & Trusty, 2005; Education Trust, 1997; Lewis, et al. 2002; Ratts, et al., 2007), scholarship has largely demonstrated a disconnect between ideal and actual practice. For instance, participants in Holmberg-Abel's study (2012) viewed meso- and macro-level advocacy as significantly less important than micro-level advocacy, particularly

as it occurred in the public arena. In that study, very few participants provided examples of advocacy past the student level, leaving the researcher to wonder if “they had little to no experience advocating for systemic change” (Holmberg-Abel, 2012, p. 142). Similarly, participants in Shaeffer’s study (2008) described advocacy from an individual—rather than a systemic—perspective, a finding reflected in previous scholarship (Perusse & Goodnough, 2001).

Of the five studies related to school counselor advocacy (Field, 2004; Fitch & Marshall, 2004; Holmberg-Abel, 2012; Schaeffer, et al. 2010; Singh, et al., 2010), only Singh et al.’s (2010) findings reflected a definition of advocacy that included a significant emphasis on systemic change. Unlike the other studies examining school counselor advocacy, Singh and colleagues (2010) used criterion sampling to select participants who had experience advocating for systemic change within their schools. My findings related to an advocacy definition were more consistent with those of Singh, et al. (2010). The use of criterion sampling to select participants could explain why perceptions of advocacy among participants in both my findings and those of Singh et al. (2010) differed from those presented in other studies (Field, 2004; Fitch & Marshall, 2004; Perusse & Goodnough, 2001; Schaeffer, et al. 2010; Singh, et al., 2010). The variations may further suggest that the majority of school counselors seldom engage in advocacy at the systems level.

### **B. Advocacy for and with LGBT Students across Identity Groups**

Many educators, including school counselors—most of whom identify as White, heterosexual and cisgender—lack the competency and awareness to successfully advocate for and with LGBT students across identity groups (Goodrich & Luke, 2010; Luke, Goodrich, Scarborough, 2011; Savage, Prout, & Chard, 2004; Singh, 2010). This is not surprising given

how systems of oppression saturate our ability to understand and challenge systems of power and privilege (Bell, 1997). Much of the LGBT student-related scholarship has hence focused on strategies to effectively support and advocate for and with LGBT students (Gonzalez & McNulty, 2011; Graybill, et al., 2009). Consistent with the strategies outlined in the literature, participants in this study described a variety of practices to advocate both with and on behalf of LGBT students across identity groups and at various levels. Specifically, participants provided students with individual support, encouraged self-advocacy and the majority advised an LGBT-friendly group or club. Additionally, they used education as a tool to create awareness about LGBT issues with students, colleagues, and the public. Further, participants took steps to cultivate a safe and affirming culture for LGBT students and used data to motivate systemic change. Several also developed strategic alliances with community organizations, engaged in legislative activism to challenge district norms and pushed for LGBT-inclusive policy reform. The methods employed by participants are reflective of the more wide-reaching social/political and systems-based advocacy practices encouraged by recent school counseling reform models (ASCA National Model, 2005; Education Trust, 1997), the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Lewis, et al., 2002), and social justice education pedagogy (Bell, 2007).

One of the primary means or strategies participants used to advocate for and with LGBT students was by serving as sponsor or co-sponsor to a GSA. In fact, 10 of the 12 participants had direct or indirect involvement with such a club. In addition, three of the participants—all of whom were employed in urban settings—facilitated or organized group counseling for LGBT and questioning students. Participants' roles in both the club and group was mostly described as one of support, guidance and advocacy with rather than on behalf of students; overwhelmingly participants reported that club initiatives and events were student-led, a finding consistent with

existing scholarship (GLSEN, 2012; Griffin, et al., 2004). Further, participants were intentional about cultivating spaces for student exploration, self-empowerment and identity development and took steps to ensure the inclusion of transgender students and issues. In many instances, participants provided students with leadership opportunities both in the school and in the community.

Although most participants reported that the racial and socioeconomic composition of GSA clubs and counseling groups reflected those of the general student body, four of the ten participants who served as GSA co-sponsors explicitly noted that very few or no students of color were involved in the club and those who did attend meetings, seldom actively contributed. Participants further expressed that issues of class were never addressed at meetings.

Additionally, only one participant recalled specific conversations related to Black students' negotiations of their racial and sexual identities. The lack of student of color representation in GSAs reported by participants is consistent with studies that have found scarce participation among LGBT students of color in LGBT-related school activities, including GSAs (McCready, 2001; Rosario et al., 2004). Possible explanations could include the association of LGBT identity with White culture (Singh, 2010) or the belief by some LGBT people of color that identification with the LGBT community represents a betrayal of racial or ethnic group membership (Greene, 1998).

Perhaps most notably, participants expressed that the intersection of sexual orientation with religion and cultural beliefs was a more frequently discussed topic among LGBT students of color than race, both in GSA meetings and during individual counseling sessions. Specifically, participants expressed that religious resistance based on others' interpretation of religion led many LGBT students—both White and of color—to seek individual support and guidance.

According to participants, students faced religious hostility from parents, community members and school personnel on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. In particular, several of the participants disclosed that students of color reported difficulty reconciling their personal faith with their sexual orientation and gender identity -- especially in their homes and communities. The tension between the actual or perceived lack of familial and community support caused many students of color to remain in the closet about their sexual orientation, according to participants. Such a finding is reflective of existing scholarship, including a study by Rosario and colleagues (2004) which determined that Black and Latino youth were less likely to disclose their sexual orientation to peers and family members.

Both in terms of race and socioeconomic status, results from this study indicated that LGBT students who are navigating multiple marginalized identities face additional challenges, a finding consistent with existing research (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009; Hunter, 2001; Kumashiro, 2001). Additionally, findings revealed that other social identities, including race and class, may be more salient for LGBT students of color and LGBT lower-income students than sexual orientation or gender identity (Greene, 1998; McCready, 2001). One participant, who also served as the liaison to homeless students in her school, expressly mentioned that students from low-income families are also more reluctant to be open about their sexual orientation both because of peers' real or perceived attitudes about LGBT people and because they were more concerned about obtaining essential resources such as food and adequate health care.

On an individual level, participants in this study also encouraged students to develop self-advocacy skills by teaching them to identify and navigate barriers that may inhibit their academic progress and emotional well-being. In addition, they provided students opportunities to cultivate their leadership potential and collaborated with them on systemic change efforts, the latter of

which is encouraged in the conceptual literature (Lewis, et al., 2002; Ratts, et al., 2007) but seldom translated to actual practice by school counselors (Field, 2004; Holberg-Abel, 2012; Schaffer, et al., 2010).

Nearly all participants used education as a means to create awareness among students, school personnel and the public as well as to improve their personal knowledge of LGBT issues. Consistent with the ACA Advocacy Competencies and SJE framework, participants engaged in education as advocacy at the micro-, meso-, and macro-level and did so both with and on behalf of students. At the micro-level, participants spoke individually with students—most often in response to an anti-LGBT epithet—and with faculty members, generally to provide resources or information about LGBT issues. At the meso-level, participants facilitated classroom guidance lessons and other programming either individually or in collaboration with others. They engaged in education as advocacy at the macro-level by leading district, state, and national trainings and workshops. One of the participants also disseminated LGBT student-related resources for school counselors and educators via a blog.

While research in other fields has examined training school personnel as a means of advocating for LGBT students (Chen-Hayes, 2001; GLSEN, 2012; Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010; Graybill, et al, 2009; Stone, 2003), less is known about involving students in initiatives to raise awareness about LGBT issues. Participants who worked with students on education-based advocacy efforts emphasized the positive impact such initiatives had on both the students and the school community. While participants' educational initiatives were typically well-received, they noted that school personnel had the least competence with and most resistance to issues of gender identity and expression. In addition to educating others, participants sought out opportunities for professional development to enhance their knowledge of LGBT student-related



issues. Participants noted that their attendance at most workshops and trainings was voluntary and, most often, individually initiated. The voluntary nature of such trainings could explain why so many school counselors lack the competence and skills to advocate effectively for and with LGBT students across identity groups (Goodrich & Luke, 2010; Luke, Goodrich, Scarborough, 2011; Savage, Prout, & Chard, 2004), especially at the systems level (Graybill, et al., 2009).

One method participants used to educate students about issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity was through an LGBT-inclusive curriculum. Although research has demonstrated the positive benefits of an LGBT-inclusive curriculum on school climate (GLSEN, 2012), it remains a seldom employed pedagogical practice (GLSEN, 2011; Griffin & Ouellett, 2002). Nevertheless, most of the participants in this study incorporated matters of sexual orientation and gender identity into their classroom guidance or small group counseling curriculum, especially when discussing diversity or character education. In such instances, participants included sexual orientation and gender identity and expression among issues related to race, disability, religion and other social identities. Some participants designed lessons for a particular classroom as a response to teacher-reported anti-LGBT language or behavior. For the most part, however, delivery of LGBT-inclusive curriculum was proactive rather than reactive and often involved student collaboration. For instance, one of the participants trained 40 student leaders to facilitate an LGBT-inclusive anti-bullying and harassment lesson for ninth grade students.

Existing studies in the school counseling literature have found that school counselors seldom engage in advocacy beyond the student level (Field, 2004; Holmberg-Abel, 2012; Schaeffer, et al., 2010). Participants in this study took various school-wide measures to foster a culture of support and affirmation for and with LGBT students across identity groups. All

participants used a variety of methods to make visible their support and affirmation of LGBT students and their willingness to advocate for and with them. Establishing themselves as a safe person among students and school personnel meant that they were usually the point of contact for students, parents and faculty members. Consistent with LGBT-related scholarship in the field of education (Gonzalez & McNulty, 2011; Graybill, et al., 2009), most participants displayed their support via visible displays such as stickers, posters and Pride flags.

In addition, 10 of the 12 participants in this study advocated for and with LGBT students in collaboration with community organizations. Analogous with findings from Singh and colleagues (2010), participants developed intentional alliances within the community and underscored the importance of working with supportive school personnel and community members in creating systemic change. Participants often partnered with community groups and organizations on school-level initiatives and community events, often directly involving LGBT youth. Several of the participants were also active members of local, state, and national LGBT-related groups and organizations. Additionally, participants wielded their political savvy when necessary to advocate for policy change and challenge district norms and practices. Although all participants viewed inclusive policies and practices as paramount, only three provided explicit examples of legislative activism for and with LGBT students. Nine of the participants were employed in districts with an LGB or LGBT-inclusive student policy and many received district-level support; such circumstance may explain why only three participants engaged in legislative activism.

The use of data as a form of advocacy is a practice that is encouraged by both the ASCA National Model (2005) and the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Lewis, et al., 2002); however, there is a dearth of empirical research on how school counselors can leverage data to advocate

for and with students. Consistent with findings from Singh, et al. (2010), many of the participants used data—both their own self-generated data and existing school-level data—as a means of creating awareness about the need for systemic change. One of the participants, Keith, also used data to advocate for his profession by demonstrating to administrators the impact of his work on students. As a result, Keith was the participant with the lightest caseload and among the participants with the most resources to advocate for and with LGBT students.

### **C. Factors that Facilitate and Impede Advocacy**

Certain factors consistently emerged as either enabling or inhibiting participants' advocacy efforts. Specifically, participants described faculty and district-level support and LGBT-inclusive anti-bullying and harassment policies as facilitating their work for and with LGBT students. While participants in urban settings reported the highest degree of faculty and administrative support, all participants could identify at least one supportive colleague within the school and benefitted as a result. The role of professional support has also been found to play an important role in the advocacy efforts of GSA advisors (Graybill, 2011).

Several participants expressed the importance of establishing credibility around LGBT issues when seeking administrative support for LGBT-related initiatives. Building positive, collaborative relationships with administrators was also noted as an important factor in obtaining support especially in rural or more conservative school settings. Such findings reflect a study by Griffin and Ouellett (2002) which determined that principals are more likely to embrace LGBT-related efforts when initiated by a faculty member viewed as a credible. Participants also benefitted from school counseling programs that provided adequate training for advocacy in general and with LGBT students specifically. In particular, three participants who attended programs with a specific focus on social justice described receiving comprehensive and

intersectional training related to advocacy with students across social identity groups, including those who identified as LGBT.

In addition to professional support, established LGBT-inclusive anti-bullying student policies facilitated participants' advocacy efforts for and with LGBT students. While the positive impact of LGBT-inclusive anti-bullying and harassment policies on LGBT students' school experiences is well documented (GLSEN, 2012; Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006; Hatzenbuehler & Keyes, 2013; Kosciw, et al., 2012; Szalacha, 2003), there is a paucity of research on the degree to which such policies effect the advocacy efforts of educators in general (Graybill, 2011) and school counselors in particular. Findings related to the impact of LGBT-inclusive student policies on school counseling practice are therefore unique to this study. Of the 12 participants, nine were employed in school districts with LGB or LGBT-inclusive anti-bullying and harassment and/or student non-discrimination policies. Nevertheless, all participants agreed that LGBT-inclusive student policies played a crucial role in creating a pathway toward more effective and broad-based advocacy. Notably, the four participants from urban school settings worked in a district with an LGBT-inclusive student policy. Of the two rural participants, only Brad's school district included student protections based on sexual orientation but not gender identity and gender expression; additionally, his was the only rural school district in the state with such protections. Overwhelmingly, participants who worked in districts with inclusive student policies received more administrative and district-level support, especially with regard to system-wide programming initiatives.

Consistent with the literature (Schneider & Dimito, 2008), inclusive policies yielded greater support from colleagues who might have otherwise been resistant. Indeed, such policies legitimated participants' advocacy initiatives at the micro-, meso-, and macro-level and provided

the leverage necessary to effectively navigate resistance. Existence of an LGBT-inclusive student policy was particularly beneficial to participants working in more rural and/or conservative areas and to those who identified as lesbian or gay. Specifically, of the two rural school counselors who participated in this study, the one employed in a district with an LGBT-inclusive student policy underscored its importance in obtaining at least minimal support from parents, administrators and faculty members. In contrast, participants with no policy reported much greater difficulty challenging opposition related to their efforts with LGBT students.

Among the factors that hindered school counselors' efforts, religious resistance, limited faculty and administrative support, and structural barriers—such as lack of time and a heavy caseload—were the most significant. Looking more narrowly at Field's (2004) research on school counselors' general advocacy experiences, factors that impeded advocacy among participants included a lack of support from administrators and school personnel, heavy caseloads, an unclear job description and a sense of being undervalued. A lack of support was also cited as impeding the advocacy efforts of school counselors in a mixed methods study by Holmberg-Abel (2012). Additionally, limited support from administrators was described as a potential barrier for advocacy with LGBT students by education and counseling graduate students (McCabe & Robinson, 2008), and GSA advisors (Graybill, 2008; Graybill, 2011). Likewise, participants in this study specifically mentioned lack of administrative support, substantial caseloads and an increased focus on non-counseling tasks—such as standardized testing—as barriers to advocacy.

The scarcity of LGBT-related community resources and organizations was reported as an obstacle for participants in rural settings. Consistent with these findings, existing research has demonstrated that LGBT community organizations are virtually non-existent in rural

communities (Graybill, 2011). Indeed, researchers have established a positive correlation between more LGBT-affirming community organizations and resources and increased support for LGBT programs in schools (Fetner & Kush, 2008; Kosciw et al., 2009; Rienzo, et al., 2009). As such, educators who have access to such resources may be more likely to advocate for and with LGBT students (Graybill, 2011).

In addition, studies have shown that LGBT students who attend schools in rural communities and small towns experience more hostility (GLSEN, 2012) and have fewer supportive adult role models (Yarborough, 2006) than those in urban and suburban schools. The difficulty I experienced in recruiting school counselors from rural settings who had served as advocates for and with LGBT students is worth noting. Specifically, I directly emailed over 80 rural school counselors and only two—those who participated—responded to my request and subsequently accepted my invitation. In addition, neither of the rural participants worked at schools with active GSAs at the time of study.

Arguably, most of the administrative and faculty opposition related to participants' advocacy efforts for and with LGBT students was rooted in religion-based prejudices, a finding unique to this study. It is worth noting that participants were not asked about the impact of religion on their advocacy experiences. Nevertheless, 10 of the 12 participants from rural, urban, and suburban settings spoke extensively about the role of religious resistance in their students' lives as well as on their advocacy efforts. Specifically, participants faced religion-based opposition from community members, parents and colleagues, including some of their fellow school counselors. Referring to school counseling colleagues, one of the participants described incongruity between "professional responsibility and professional ethics with regard to using...a

personal faith system” related to LGBT issues and underscored the need to address the tension between personal faith and ethical obligations at the national level.

While religious resistance was experienced by participants from urban, rural and suburban school settings, it was reported as more prevalent among the two participants from rural schools. One participant in particular received hate mail from the community, much of which was “church-led and church-organized.” She was also accused of being a pedophile and faced the possibility of contractual non-renewal as a result of her advocacy for and with LGBT students.

Despite the many obstacles faced by participants, they took significant risks and forged ahead with unwavering determination and an unconditional commitment to change the school climate for with and LGBT students across identity groups. This phenomenon—which I defined as “advocacy as purpose-driven”—emerged as a unique category in this research study and encompassed an essence of being, motivations for advocacy, a willingness to confront adversity and a desire to do more. There is a growing body of conceptual and empirical literature on the role of disposition on school counselors’ advocacy behaviors and competencies (Nilsson & Schmidt, 2005; Parikh, 2008; Schaeffer, et al., 2010; Trusty & Brown, 2005). Disposition, as defined in the school counseling literature, refers to personal values and beliefs with regard to advocacy and represents one of the three domains of the ASCA Advocacy Competencies (Trusty & Brown, 2005). While such a description is similar to the thematic category “advocacy as purpose-driven,” it does not adequately capture the degree of commitment and determination—even in the face of substantial risk and opposition—to proactive, systemic change demonstrated by participants in this study. For instance, while school counselors in other studies expressed a

general disposition toward advocacy (Holmberg-Abel, 2012; Schaeffer, et al., 2010), their beliefs did not translate to an advocacy that is proactive, systemic and willing to withstand controversy.

Further, most participants in this study noted that while their colleagues were generally supportive of LGBT students, valued advocacy as an ethical obligation, and intervened when necessary, they did so reactively and did not—as one of the participants described—“have a burning desire to...grab the torch and run.” For the majority of participants in this study, advocacy was much more than a personal value or a belief; it was described as the essence of their being. Participants who viewed advocacy as purpose-driven were hence willing to sustain significant adversity and proactively sought out opportunities for continued advocacy and personal growth. Advocacy as purpose-driven may explain the variation of findings between the sort of reactive, individual-level advocacy demonstrated by school counselors in previous studies (Field, 2004; Holmberg-Abel, 2012; Schaeffer, et al., 2010) and the proactive advocacy displayed by participants in this study at the micro-, meso-, and macro-level.

#### **D. Implications for Future Research**

Findings from this study offer important implications for research, practice, policy, and counselor education. With regard to research, additional studies need to be conducted to more thoroughly understand the topic of school counselor advocacy for and with LGBT students across identity groups. The focus of this study centered on the experiences of high school counselors in the southeastern United States across rural, urban, and suburban settings. This research needs to be expanded to include the experiences of school counselors in all regions of the country as well as those who do not self-identify as advocates for LGBT students and/or who have no experience advocating for and with this population. Because the vast majority of research on LGBT students is conducted at the high school level, studies of school counselors’



advocacy experiences with LGBT students in elementary and middle school settings would assist in generating developmentally appropriate and effective advocacy interventions for LGBT students across grade levels. In addition, the experiences of LGBT students' interactions with their school counselors as well as their perceptions of advocacy should be examined to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of school counselor advocacy with LGBT students. A student-generated definition of school counselor advocacy, anchored in their lived experiences, may better inform how school counselors and other educators can most effectively advocate for and with them.

While not considered by the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Lewis, et al. 2002), school setting appears to have played a role in determining how and the extent to which participants in this study engaged in advocacy. Findings from previous empirical scholarship on school counselor advocacy (Fitch & Marshall, 2004; Shaeffer, et al., 2010) have revealed the potential impact of school setting. For instance, Fitch and Mitchell (2004) found that school counselors at high-achieving and more affluent schools dedicated more time to advocacy-based initiatives than school counselors at low-achieving schools which tended to be poor and more rural. Results from this study suggest that contextual factors—such as school setting—may impact the extent to which school counselors advocate for and with students in general and LGBT students in particular. Overall, participants from urban settings had more administrative support and more access to community resources than those in suburban and rural settings. Conversely, participants in rural settings faced more resistance—particularly on the basis of religion—and had virtually no access to community resources. Additional research is needed to determine the effect of school setting on both the lived experiences of LGBT students as well as the school counselors who advocate for and with them.

The vast majority of empirical scholarship related to school counselor advocacy has focused on “how” school counselors practice advocacy (Field, 2004; Fitch & Marshall, 2004; Holmberg-Abel, 2012; Schaeffer, et al. 2010; Singh, et al., 2010) rather than exploring “why.” Further, with the exception of a study conducted by Singh and colleagues (2010), research on school counselor advocacy has found that school counselors describe advocacy as individual rather than systemic and that they seldom engage in advocacy beyond the student level (Field, 2004; Holmberg-Abel, 2012; Perusse & Goodnough, 2001; Schaeffer, et al., 2010). Participants in this study engaged in systemic advocacy and viewed advocacy as a central, purpose-driven aspect of their identity – a finding that emerged as unique to this study. Advocacy as purpose-driven may explain the variation in findings regarding school counselors’ advocacy experiences. Future research should more closely examine “advocacy as purpose-driven” as a contributing factor to school counselor advocacy. Indeed, more thoroughly understanding the factors that motivate advocacy may prove helpful in understanding and subsequently improving “how” school counselors engage in student advocacy. Given its emphasis on systemic change, an SJE lens of analysis may provide additional insight related to school counselor advocacy engagement beyond the student level. Specifically, future scholarship may benefit from using SJE as a lens for secondary school counselor advocacy for and with LGBT students as a means of more comprehensively understanding the impact of students’ intersecting identities on school counselors’ advocacy practices at the micro-, meso-, and macrolevels (Hardiman & Jackson, 2007).

Findings from this study indicated that LGBT students of color and those who are lower-income face additional challenges and may experience their sexual orientation or gender identity as less salient than their race and/or class identities. Rather than universalize the experiences of

LGBT students—as much of the existing scholarship related to LGBT students has done (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009; Russell & Truong, 2001)—future research needs to explore the complex experiences of LGBT students across identity groups while taking into account within-group variability. For instance, research aimed at examining the unique experiences of specific identity groups under the umbrella term “LGBT students of color”—such as Latino/a, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black—may provide a more nuanced understanding regarding the individual and collective experiences of this population. Further research related to the experiences of LGBT students of color and lower-income students may aid school counselors and other educators in more adequately serving this population. To this end, an SJE framework can be applied to more comprehensively understand the impact of students multiple marginalized identities (Adams, 2010).

Participants noted that LGBT students most frequently sought their support for issues related to the interpretation of religion as well as their family’s cultural beliefs about sexual orientation and gender identity. Further, while the impact of religion was not included as a question in the interview protocol, 10 of the 12 participants across rural, urban, and suburban settings cited religious resistance as a significant barrier to advocacy. Despite such findings, there exists no empirical scholarship in school counseling literature to date on the effect of religion-based intolerance on school counselor advocacy, either in general or with LGBT students. Additional research that examines these experiences may inform effective strategies for navigating religious resistance in schools.

This study was conducted in the southeastern United States, a region of the country in which LGBT students are more likely to experience a more hostile school environment than LGBT students in other areas of the country (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009). Future studies on school

counselor advocacy with LGBT students should hence include regions outside the southeastern United States to assess the impact of geographical location in determining religious-based resistance related to LGBT student advocacy in schools.

### **E. Implications for Practice & Counselor Education**

Overwhelmingly, participants in this study described the positive impact of supportive faculty in facilitating their advocacy efforts for and with LGBT students across identity groups. Establishing a supportive network of colleagues and community organizations at the school and district level seemed to assist practicing school counselors in navigating structural barriers and addressing resistance, particularly for those employed in rural and/or conservative school settings.

Additionally, findings from this study revealed that LGBT students of color and those from poor or working class backgrounds may have different needs than their White and/or middle class counterparts. School counselors may hence benefit from grounding their advocacy efforts within an SJE framework, as it considers the compounding impact of race, class, cultural contexts, and other identities on LGBT students' experiences (Adams, 2010). Additionally, issues such as acculturation and citizenship status may further inform how school counselors engage in advocacy for and with LGBT students of color.

Ideally, counselor educators need to prepare aspiring school counselors and educators to advocate effectively for and with all students at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. With the exception of three participants who graduated from school counseling programs specifically foregrounded in social justice, the vast majority expressed that when issues related to LGBT advocacy were discussed, LGBT students were presented as a monolithic group rather than a diverse subset of the population comprised of different races, ethnicities, genders, abilities, and

class designations. For those participants, training related to advocacy interventions with LGBT students did not consider the degree to which other social identities impact how LGBT students' negotiate their sexual orientation and gender identity in schools. Further, most participants received virtually no training on advocacy as a means of motivating systemic change for and with LGBT students. School counseling programs may benefit from an SJE approach to advocacy with LGBT students, one that emphasizes systems-level interventions and takes into account the effect of multiple marginalized identities on LGBT students' experiences. In addition to the ASCA National Model (2005), school counselor educators may benefit from integrating the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Lewis, et al., 2002) as a fundamental component—and not just an appendage of—students' ongoing training. Such a framework for school counselor education—grounded in SJE and inclusive of the ACA Advocacy Competencies—may provide aspiring school counselors with the tools necessary to more effectively advocate for and with LGBT students across identity groups at the micro-, meso-, and macro-level. Practicing school counselors may also profit from continued SJE-based professional development related to LGBT issues in schools.

Participants in this study viewed advocacy as central to their identity as a school counselor. Given the extent to which “advocacy as purpose-driven” motivated advocacy among participants at all levels, school counselor educators may benefit from recruiting graduate candidates whose values and passions align with said thematic category. Consistent with an SJE theoretical orientation, school counseling programs that support advocacy identity development and critical reflective practice may allow aspiring school counselors to grow as advocates and more thoroughly understand their role as agents for systemic change. Within SJE, reflective practice (Bell, 2007) also affords practitioners the opportunity to examine their multiple social

identities and understand the ways in which they intersect and inform one another within the school and broader community. A focus on school counselors' social identities and advocacy development may assist in determining whether and to what extent "advocacy as purpose-driven" can be cultivated and strengthened among school counselors.

Further, because the vast majority of school counselors—including the ones in this study—identify as White, heterosexual and cisgender (Goodrich & Luke, 2010; Singh, 2010)—school counseling programs may benefit from encouraging aspiring school counselors to explore the ways in which their personal social identities shape their experiences and impact the students with whom they work. Finally, more research is needed to assess the effectiveness of advocacy training in school counseling graduate programs and professional development workshops, particularly as it relates to systems-level advocacy.

## **F. Policy Implications**

Previous scholarship related to LGBT-inclusive anti-bullying policies has focused primarily on how such policies effect LGBT students'—rather than educators'—school experiences (Goodenow, et al., 2006; Kosciw, et al., 2012; Szalacha, 2003). Hence, the positive impact of LGBT-inclusive anti-bullying or non-discrimination policies on school counseling practice emerged as a significant finding in this study. Participants who were employed in school districts that included explicit protections for students on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity expressed that such policies legitimated their advocacy efforts, thereby facilitating the degree to which they engaged in advocacy—particularly at the systemic level—and assisted them in navigating resistance. LGBT-inclusive student policies were particularly beneficial to participants employed in conservative and/or rural districts. For instance, of the two rural participants, one worked in a district with an inclusive policy and therefore had a vastly

different experience regarding advocacy for and with LGBT students – despite having faced similar religious-based resistance from parents and community members. In addition, one of the participants who identified as gay underscored the importance of LGBT-inclusive policies which protect both students and faculty members from harassment and discrimination, particularly faculty members who identify as LGBT.

In developing policy aimed at cultivating safer, more affirming school climates for all students, policy makers should consider the power such policies carry – both in granting legitimacy to issues of advocacy with LGBT students as well as in empowering school counselors and other educators to take action, especially those who work in rural and/or conservative school settings. Equally important as the development of LGBT-inclusive anti-bullying and harassment policies is the training provided to school personnel to appropriately enforce said policies and effectively intervene when anti-LGBT bullying occurs. Indeed, participants who worked in districts that allocated funds for professional development related to LGBT issues engaged in advocacy within as well as beyond the school level and did so proactively. School districts with LGBT-inclusive student policies may benefit from a component related to professional development of school personnel to ensure proper implementation.

### **G. Limitations**

Although this study yields significant contributions to both school counseling and SJE literature, it is not without limitations. Contextual factors such as geographical location, caseload and school climate theoretically affect the degree to which high school counselors can serve as advocates for and with LGBT students; as such, the phenomenon may manifest differently depending on the situation or environment. In this study, participants were employed in different

schools and school districts located in urban, rural or suburban settings and had different perspectives and experiences of school counselor advocacy in general and with LGBT students across identity groups. Further, criterion sampling (Creswell, 2007)—while effective in recruiting participants who met the predetermined criteria of having served as advocates for and with LGBT students—limited the study’s findings by excluding the experiences of school counselors who had not acted as advocates for and with LGBT students.

The moderately small and homogenous sample also restricted the generalizability of findings (Merriam, 2009). Specifically, of the 12 school counselors who participated, only one identified as a person of color and none were transgender or bisexual. Although there was heterogeneity among participants with regard to gender and sexual orientation, all but one of the male participants identified as gay; conversely, the majority of female participants were heterosexual. Additionally, only two school counselors from rural settings participated in this study. Further, while this study examined differences in school setting across the southeastern United States, it is likely that high school counselors who have served as advocates for and with LGBT students in regions outside the Southeast might have different experiences than those described here. As such, the results are likely most transferable to school counselors who have advocated for and with LGBT students in the southeastern United States. Including the diverse perspectives from school counselors in regions across the country would have strengthened the study’s findings.

For this study, I conducted one-time interviews with each participant, lasting between 45 and 70 minutes. This posed another potential limitation, as additional time and multiple interviews with each participant would presumably allow for a more comprehensive understanding of their respective experiences. Variance regarding the definition of advocacy may



also be a limitation; high school counselor advocacy extends beyond issues impacting LGBT students across identity groups. Therefore, high school counselors who advocate on behalf of other issues may have a different perception or definition of advocacy. Finally, my own biases as a researcher was a limitation to this study. Throughout the process of data collection and analysis, I used a variety of techniques to address researcher bias including self-reflective journals and research memos (Creswell, 2006) as well as triangulation methods (Merriam, 1998) to compare data, transcripts, and research memos. I also regularly consulted with my committee members as well as a critical peer debriefer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and continuously interrogated how my social identities and lived experiences as a cisgender, heterosexual, middle-class Latina impacted my data analysis.

## **H. Conclusion**

Although school counselors are uniquely positioned to serve as advocates for underrepresented youth (ASCA, 2005; Ratts, et al., 2007), to date there exists virtually no empirical scholarship on school counselor advocacy with LGBT students and limited conceptual research. Using the ACA Advocacy Competencies as a conceptual framework and guided by a SJE theoretical lens, this qualitative study examined the experiences of 12 high school counselors who have served as advocates for and with LGBT students across identity groups. More specifically, high school counselors in urban, rural, and suburban settings in the southeastern United States described how they define and engage in advocacy with LGBT students across race and class differences, identified motivations for advocacy engagement, and explained factors that have impeded or facilitated their advocacy efforts. Findings contribute to the literature by providing a deeper understanding of school counselor advocacy in general and with LGBT students across social identities in particular.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **LETTER OF RECRUITMENT**

Date

Dear Participant,

My name is Maru Gonzalez and I am a doctoral candidate in the Social Justice Education Program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. I am interested in examining the experiences of high school counselors who have served as advocates for and with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students. I will be conducting qualitative interviews to explore this phenomenon for my dissertation and am inviting you to participate. As a participant, you will be asked to partake in a semi-structured, in-person interview lasting between 45 and 60 minutes and to submit copies of guidance curriculum and other personal school counseling materials relevant to your practice as a school counselor advocate for and with LGBT students.

I will take steps to protect your privacy and confidentiality during your participation in this study. The interview will be audio recorded but the tapes will be kept in a secure location and destroyed upon the study's completion. All identifying information shared during the interview and any collected materials will be redacted and used with permission. Ultimately, the purpose of this research is to explore ways in which school counselors can be more effective advocates for and with LGBT students across identity groups. As such, your perspective is essential to this study.

Thank you in advance for considering participation in this important study. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via email at [mariag@educ.umass.edu](mailto:mariag@educ.umass.edu) or by phone at 770-361-1555. You may also contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Carey Dimmitt at [cdimmitt@educ.umass.edu](mailto:cdimmitt@educ.umass.edu) or (413) 695-2772 or Dr. Linda Griffin from the Institutional Review Board at [lgriffin@educ.umass.edu](mailto:lgriffin@educ.umass.edu) or 545-6985.

Regards,

Maru Gonzalez, M.Ed.  
Ed.D. Candidate  
Social Justice Education Program  
University of Massachusetts Amherst

**APPENDIX B**  
**DEMOGRAPHIC FORM**

**1.) Age** \_\_\_\_\_

**2.) Race/Ethnicity:** *check all that apply*

\_\_\_\_\_ White \_\_\_\_\_ Black \_\_\_\_\_ Latina/o \_\_\_\_\_ Asian \_\_\_\_\_ Native American

Bicultural/Multiracial (please list) \_\_\_\_\_

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**3.) Sexual Orientation:** *check all that apply*

\_\_\_\_\_ Lesbian \_\_\_\_\_ Gay \_\_\_\_\_ Bisexual \_\_\_\_\_ Queer \_\_\_\_\_ Heterosexual/Straight

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**4.) Gender Identity:** *check all that apply*

\_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_ Transgender \_\_\_\_\_ Genderqueer

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**5.) Name of the high school where you are employed:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**6.) High School Setting:** *check all that apply*

\_\_\_\_\_ Urban \_\_\_\_\_ Suburban \_\_\_\_\_ Rural

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### Opening questions:

- 1) How long have you been a school counselor?
- 2) Have you been at this site the entire time?
- 3) Where did you complete your school counseling graduate program?

#### Body of the interview:

- 4) Tell me about the work you do as a school counselor (i.e., primary responsibilities)
- 5) How do you define advocacy within the framework of school counseling?
- 6) How do you view yourself as an advocate within that framework? Can you give me an example?
- 7) Describe your experiences serving as an advocate for and with LGBT students.
  - a) Be sure to include how participant first got involved (i.e., what motivated you? What sustains you?)
  - b) Specifically ask about involvement at the student, school and systemic/public arena levels (as outlined in the ACA Advocacy Competencies).
  - c) Can you give me a rewarding experience? A not-so-rewarding experience (i.e., difficult, did not turn out how you wanted)? What would you have done differently?
- 8) Tell me about some of the challenges/barriers you have faced—if any—in advocating for and with LGBT youth.
  - a) What facilitates your advocacy efforts within the school?
  - b) How does the complex role and function of school counselor impact your capacity to advocate for and with LGBT students?
  - c) What networks have you established in the community? How do those networks facilitate your advocacy efforts, if at all?
  - d) To what extent—if at all—do school, district, and statewide policies on LGBT students impact your practice?
- 9) The American School Counselor's Association's position statement on LGBTQ youth reads, "*Professional school counselors promote equal opportunity and respect for all individuals regardless of sexual orientation/gender identity. Professional school counselors work to eliminate barriers that impede student development and achievement and are committed to academic, personal/social and career development of all students.*" Describe for me, based on your experience, if and how your colleagues within the field of school counseling uphold this obligation at the student, school, and systemic levels (define/elaborate levels if necessary).
  - a) If not, what's missing/ what is holding them back? What needs to happen for school counselors to be better advocates for LGBT youth?
- 10) Describe the demographics in your school with regard to race and class. What is the climate like for students of color and lower-income students? Climate for LGBT students of color and LGBT low-income students?
- 11) Tell me about your experience working with LGBT students of color and those from working class backgrounds? (ask about distinct challenges, competency, etc.)

- a)** To what extent was advocacy in general and advocacy with LGBT students across identities covered in your school counseling graduate program?
- 12)** Tell me about your experience working with transgender students specifically?
  - a)** Ask follow up questions that get at distinct challenges, competency/awareness, and pushback from administration/parents, etc.
- 13)** Is there anything else you would like to share?

## APPENDIX D

### INFORMED CONSENT

Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study  
University of Massachusetts Amherst

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**Researcher(s):** Maru Gonzalez, Researcher  
Carey Dimmitt, Dissertation Chairperson

**Study Title:** School Counselor Advocacy with LGBT students: A Qualitative Study of High School Counselor Experiences

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am interested in examining the experiences of high school counselors who have served as advocates for and with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students. I will be conducting qualitative interviews to explore this phenomenon for my dissertation at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and am inviting you to participate.

The purpose of this research is to explore ways in which high school counselors advocate for and with LGBT students across identity groups. Participation in this study will involve a semi-structured in-person interview using a guided interview format consisting of thirteen questions and lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. The questions will address your views on your personal experiences advocating for and with LGBT students. In addition, you will be asked to submit copies of guidance curriculum and other personal school counseling materials relevant to your practice as a school counselor advocate for and with LGBT students.

Your name and other identifiers will not appear when I present this study or publish its results. Although you may be quoted directly, your actual name will not be used. The interview will be audio recorded and the recordings will then be transcribed. No identifying information will be included in the transcribed interview. All data gathered from participation—both written and audio recorded—will be kept in a secure location and destroyed upon the study's completion. Because of the small number of participants in this study, between 12 and 14, there is some risk you may be identified as a participant.

Participation in this study is voluntary and no compensation will be provided. At any time during the study, you may withdraw your participation. A copy of your transcribed interview will be available upon request and the opportunity to clarify content will be provided.

Thank you in advance for considering this study. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via email at mariag@educ.umass.edu or by phone at 770-361-1555. You may also contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Carey Dimmitt at cdimmitt@educ.umass.edu or (413) 695-2772 or Dr. Linda Griffin from the Institutional Review Board at lgriffin@educ.umass.edu or 545-6985.

Regards,

Maru Gonzalez

I have read the information above and reviewed it with the researcher. I understand the study and give my consent to participate.

---

Participant Name (Please print)

---

Participant signature

---

Date

## **APPENDIX E**

### **ACA ADVOCACY COMPETENCY DOMAINS**

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#### **Client/Student Empowerment**

An advocacy orientation involves not only systems change interventions but also the implementation of empowerment strategies in direct counseling with individuals, families, and groups. Advocacy-oriented counselors recognize the impact of social, political, economic, and cultural factors on human development. They also help their clients and students understand their own lives in context. This understanding helps to lay the groundwork for effective self-advocacy.

##### **Empowerment Counselor Competencies**

In direct interventions, the counselor is able to:

1. Identify strengths and resources of clients and students.
2. Identify the social, political, economic, and cultural factors that affect the client/student.
3. Recognize the signs indicating that an individual's behaviors and concerns reflect responses to systemic or internalized oppression.
4. At an appropriate development level, help the individual identify the external barriers that affect his or her development.
5. Train students and clients in self-advocacy skills.
6. Help students and clients develop self-advocacy action plans.
7. Assist students and clients in carrying out action plans.

#### **Client/Student Advocacy**

When counselors become aware of external factors that act as barriers to an individual's development, they may choose to respond through advocacy. The client/student advocate role is especially significant when individuals or vulnerable groups lack access to needed services.

##### **Client/Student Advocacy Counselor Competencies**

In environmental interventions on behalf of clients and students, the counselor is able to:

8. Negotiate relevant services and education systems on behalf of clients and students.
9. Help clients and students gain access to needed resources.
10. Identify barriers to the well-being of individuals and vulnerable groups.
11. Develop an initial plan of action for confronting these barriers.
12. Identify potential allies for confronting the barriers.
13. Carry out the plan of action.



## **Community Collaboration**

Their ongoing work with people gives counselors a unique awareness of recurring themes. Counselors are often among the first to become aware of specific difficulties in the environment. Advocacy-oriented counselors often choose to respond to such challenges by alerting existing organizations that are already working for change and that might have an interest in the issue at hand. In these situations, the counselor's primary role is as an ally. Counselors can also be helpful to organizations by making available to them our particular skills: interpersonal relations, communications, training, and research.

### **Community Collaboration Counselor Competencies**

In support of groups working toward systemic change at the school or community level, the counselor is able to:

14. Identify environmental factors that impinge upon students' and clients' development.
15. Alert community or school groups with common concerns related to the issue.
16. Develop alliances with groups working for change.
17. Use effective listening skills to gain understanding of the group's goals.
18. Identify the strengths and resources that the group members bring to the process of systemic change.
19. Communicate recognition of and respect for these strengths and resources.
20. Identify and offer the skills that the counselor can bring to the collaboration.
21. Assess the effect of counselor's interaction with the community.

## **Systems Advocacy**

When counselors identify systemic factors that act as barriers to their students' or clients' development, they often wish that they could change the environment and prevent some of the problems that they see every day. Regardless of the specific target of change, the processes for altering the status quo have common qualities. Change is a process that requires vision, persistence, leadership, collaboration, systems analysis, and strong data. In many situations, a counselor is the right person to take leadership.

### **Systems Advocacy Counselor Competencies**

In exerting systems-change leadership at the school or community level, the advocacy-oriented counselor is able to:

22. Identify environmental factors impinging on students' or clients' development.
23. Provide and interpret data to show the urgency for change.
24. In collaboration with other stakeholders, develop a vision to guide change.
25. Analyze the sources of political power and social influence within the system.
26. Develop a step-by-step plan for implementing the change process.
27. Develop a plan for dealing with probable responses to change.

28. Recognize and deal with resistance.
29. Assess the effect of counselor's advocacy efforts on the system and constituents.

## **Public Information**

Across settings, specialties, and theoretical perspectives, professional counselors share knowledge of human development and expertise in communication. These qualities make it possible for advocacy-oriented counselors to awaken the general public to macro-systemic issues regarding human dignity.

### **Public Information Counselor Competencies**

In informing the public about the role of environmental factors in human development, the advocacy-oriented counselor is able to:

30. Recognize the impact of oppression and other barriers to healthy development.
31. Identify environmental factors that are protective of healthy development.
32. Prepare written and multimedia materials that provide clear explanations of the role of specific environmental factors in human development.
33. Communicate information in ways that are ethical and appropriate for the target population.
34. Disseminate information through a variety of media.
35. Identify and collaborate with other professionals who are involved in disseminating public information.
36. Assess the influence of public information efforts undertaken by the counselor.

## **Social/Political Advocacy**

Counselors regularly act as change agents in the systems that affect their own students and clients most directly. This experience often leads toward the recognition that some of the concerns they have addressed affected people in a much larger arena. When this happens, counselors use their skills to carry out social/political advocacy,

### **Social/Political Advocacy Counselor Competencies**

In influencing public policy in a large, public arena, the advocacy-oriented counselor is able to:

37. Distinguish those problems that can best be resolved through social/political action.
38. Identify the appropriate mechanisms and avenues for addressing these problems.
39. Seek out and join with potential allies.
40. Support existing alliances for change.
41. With allies, prepare convincing data and rationales for change.
42. With allies, lobby legislators and other policy makers.

43. Maintain open dialogue with communities and clients to ensure that the social/political advocacy is consistent with the initial goals.
- 

*Source: Lewis, et al., 2002*

## APPENDIX F

### PARTICIPANT OVERVIEW

#### *Participant Overview*

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Race	Years of Experience
Keith	53	male	gay	White	21
Barry	47	male	heterosexual	White	7
Amanda	40	female	heterosexual	White	11
Tasha	31	female	heterosexual	White	2
Stewart	42	male	gay	White	3
Vicky	57	female	lesbian	POC*	27
Sara	44	female	heterosexual	White	17
Brad	42	male	gay	White	18
Daniel	38	male	gay	White	6
Bonnie	44	female	heterosexual	White	7
Melissa	56	female	heterosexual	White	26
Jessica	37	female	heterosexual	White	5

\*POC is an acronym for person of color

## APPENDIX G

### DEMOGRAPHIC AND POLICY INFORMATION FOR EACH PARTICIPANT'S SCHOOL

*Demographic and Policy Information for Each Participant's School*

Pseudonym	Racial/Ethnic Demographics	Class Composition	Setting	Inclusive Policy* (Yes/No)
Keith	51%- White 41%- Black 2%- Hispanic 1%- Asian 4%- Multiracial	26% free & reduced lunch	urban	Yes
Barry	54% White 18% Black 10% Hispanic 14% Asian 5% Multiracial	22% free & reduced lunch	suburban	Yes
Amanda	82% White 11% Black 4% Hispanic 1% Asian 2% Multiracial	54% free & reduced lunch	rural	No
Tasha	78% White 7% Black 10% Hispanic 1% Asian 3% Multiracial	22% free & reduced lunch	suburban	No
Stewart	44% White 21% Black 14% Hispanic 14% Asian 6% Multiracial .3% American Indian	19% free & reduced lunch	urban	Yes
Vicky	2% White 3% Black 94% Hispanic  1% Asian	85% free & reduced lunch	urban	Yes

Pseudonym	Racial/Ethnic Demographics	Class Composition	Setting	Inclusive Policy (Yes/No)
Melissa	23% White 40% Black 36% Hispanic 2% Asian .3% American Indian	46% free & reduced lunch	urban	Yes
Sara	51% White 36% Black 8% Hispanic 2% Asian 3% Multiracial .2% American Indian	59% free & reduced lunch	suburban	Yes
Brad	21% White 70% Black 3% Hispanic 2% Asian 3% Multiracial .3% American Indian	69% free & reduced lunch	rural	Yes but only sexual orientation
Daniel	52% White 15% Black 10% Hispanic 18% Asian 4% Multiracial .3% American Indian	16% free & reduced lunch	suburban	Yes
Bonnie	43% White 10% Black 19% Hispanic 24% Asian 4% Multiracial .4% American Indian	22% free & reduced lunch	suburban	Yes
Jessica	82% White 2% Black 5% Hispanic 8% Asian 2% Multiracial .3% American Indian	5% free & reduced lunch	suburban	No

\*“Inclusive policy” refers to a district-level anti-bullying and/or harassment policy or a non-discrimination policy that is inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students.

## APPENDIX H

### THEMATIC CATEGORIES

Thematic Category	Sub-themes
Student Advocacy	Providing Individual Support Encouraging Self-Advocacy Advising and LGBT-friendly Group or Club Connection to Resources
Education as Advocacy	Educating Students Educating School Personnel Educating at the Macro-Level Educating Self
Systems Advocacy	Navigating Structural Barriers Use of Data Establishing Safety
Social/Political Advocacy	Community Collaboration Legislative Activism
Advocacy as Purpose-Driven	Essence of Being Motivation Confronting Adversity Desire to Do More
Support	Faculty and District-Level Support Inclusive Policies

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